Nikolai Nosov

The Adventures of Dunno and His Friends

SOVIET LITERATURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Nikolai Nosov
The Adventures of Dunno and His Friends
A Tale
rated
Laptev
Foreign Languages
Publishing House
Moscow

Н. НОСОВ

ПРИКЛЮЧЕНИЯ НЕЗНАЙКИ И ЕГО ДРУЗЕЙ

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY MARGARET WETTLIN

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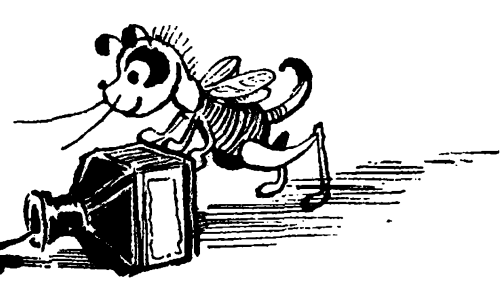


Chapter One

THE MITES OF FLOWER TOWN

Once upon a time, in a town in fairyland, lived some people called the Mites. They were called the Mites because they were very tiny. The biggest of them was no bigger than a pine cone. Their town was very pretty. Around every house grew daisies, dandelions, and honeysuckle, and the streets were all named after flowers: Blue-bell Street, Daisy Lane, and Primrose Avenue. That is why the town was called Flower Town. It stood on the bank of a little brook. The Mites called it Cucumber River because so many cucumbers grew on its banks.

On the other side of the brook was a wood. The Mites made boats out of birch-bark and crossed the brook in them when they went to gather nuts, berries, and mushrooms in the wood. It was hard for the Mites to

pick berries because they were so small. When they picked nuts they had to climb the bushes and take saws with them to cut off the stems, for the Mites could not pick the nuts by hand. They sawed off mushrooms, too—sawed them off at the very ground, then cut them into pieces and carried them home on their shoulders like logs.

There were two kinds of Mites—boy-Mites and girl-Mites. The boy-Mites wore long trousers or short breeches held up by braces, and the girl-Mites wore dresses made out of all sorts of bright materials. The boy-Mites couldn't be bothered to comb their hair, and so they cut it short, but the girl-Mites wore their hair long. They loved to comb it in all sorts of pretty ways. Some wore it in long plaits with ribbons woven into them. Others wore it hanging about their shoulders with big bows on top.

The boy-Mites were so proud of being boys that they would have nothing to do with the girl-Mites. And the girl-Mites were so proud of being girls that they would not make friends with the boy-Mites. If a girl-Mite caught sight of a boy-Mite coming down the street, she would cross to the other side. And she was quite right, for some of the boy-Mites were so nasty they would be sure to give her a shove or pull her hair or call her a horrid name. They were not *all* like this, of course, but you couldn't tell what they were like by looking at them, and so the girl-Mites decided to cross the street every time, just in case. Sometimes you could hear a boy-Mite call a

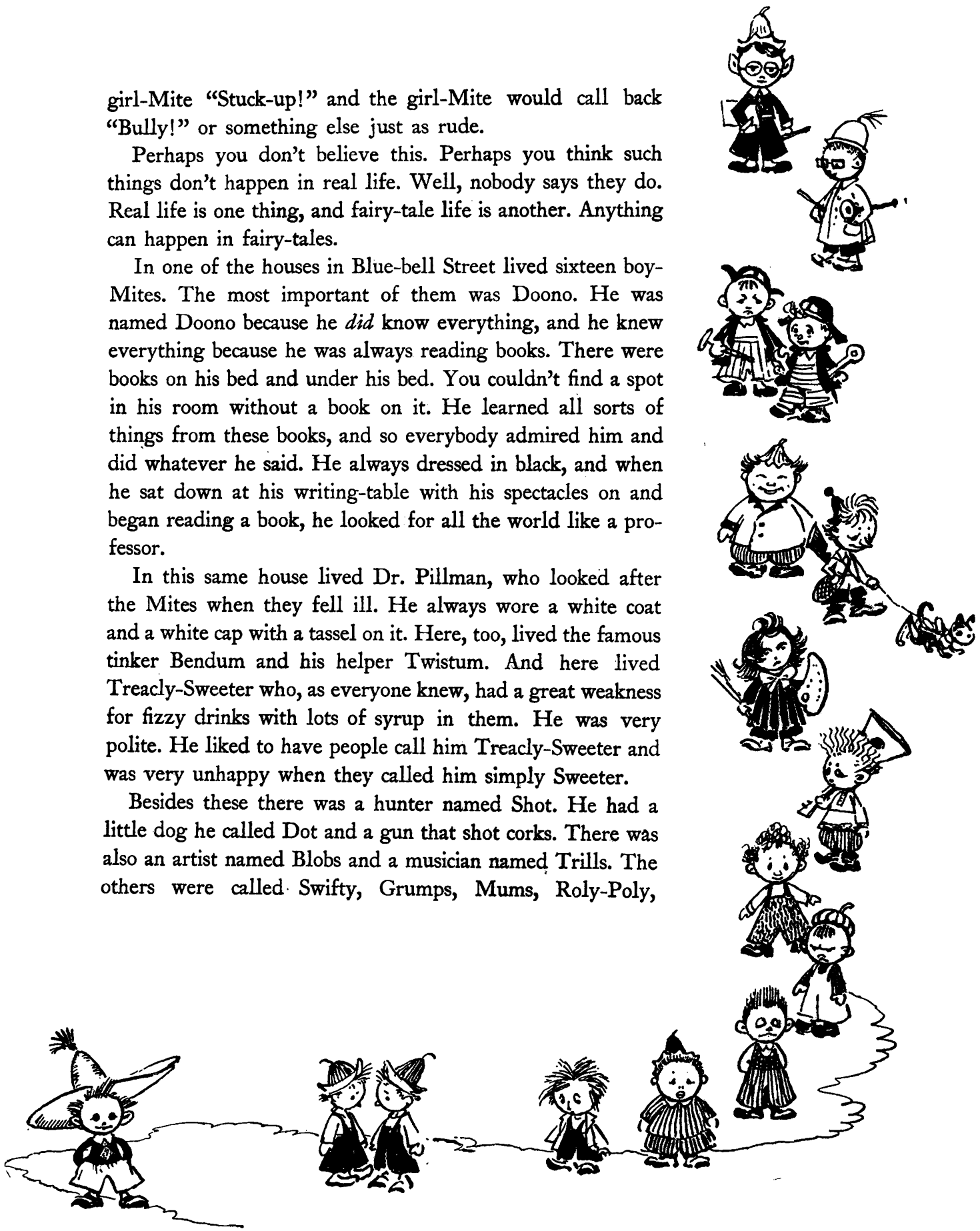
girl-Mite "Stuck-up!" and the girl-Mite would call back "Bully!" or something else just as rude.

Perhaps you don't believe this. Perhaps you think such things don't happen in real life. Well, nobody says they do. Real life is one thing, and fairy-tale life is another. Anything can happen in fairy-tales.

In one of the houses in Blue-bell Street lived sixteen boy-Mites. The most important of them was Doono. He was named Doono because he *did* know everything, and he knew everything because he was always reading books. There were books on his bed and under his bed. You couldn't find a spot in his room without a book on it. He learned all sorts of things from these books, and so everybody admired him and did whatever he said. He always dressed in black, and when he sat down at his writing-table with his spectacles on and began reading a book, he looked for all the world like a professor.

In this same house lived Dr. Pillman, who looked after the Mites when they fell ill. He always wore a white coat and a white cap with a tassel on it. Here, too, lived the famous tinker Bendum and his helper Twistum. And here lived Treacly-Sweeter who, as everyone knew, had a great weakness for fizzy drinks with lots of syrup in them. He was very polite. He liked to have people call him Treacly-Sweeter and was very unhappy when they called him simply Sweeter.

Besides these there was a hunter named Shot. He had a little dog he called Dot and a gun that shot corks. There was also an artist named Blobs and a musician named Trills. The others were called Swifty, Grumps, Mums, Roly-Poly,



Scatterbrain, and two brothers, P'raps and Prob'ly. But the most famous of them all was a Mite by the name of Dunno. He was called Dunno because he did *not* know everything—in fact he did not know *anything*.

Dunno wore a bright blue hat, bright yellow trousers, a bright orange shirt, and a bright green tie. He was very fond of bright colours. He would dress himself up in his bright clothes and go wandering about the streets making up all sorts of tales and telling them to everybody he met. He loved to tease the girl-Mites. As soon as a girl-Mite caught sight of his orange shirt coming down the street she would turn round and run home.

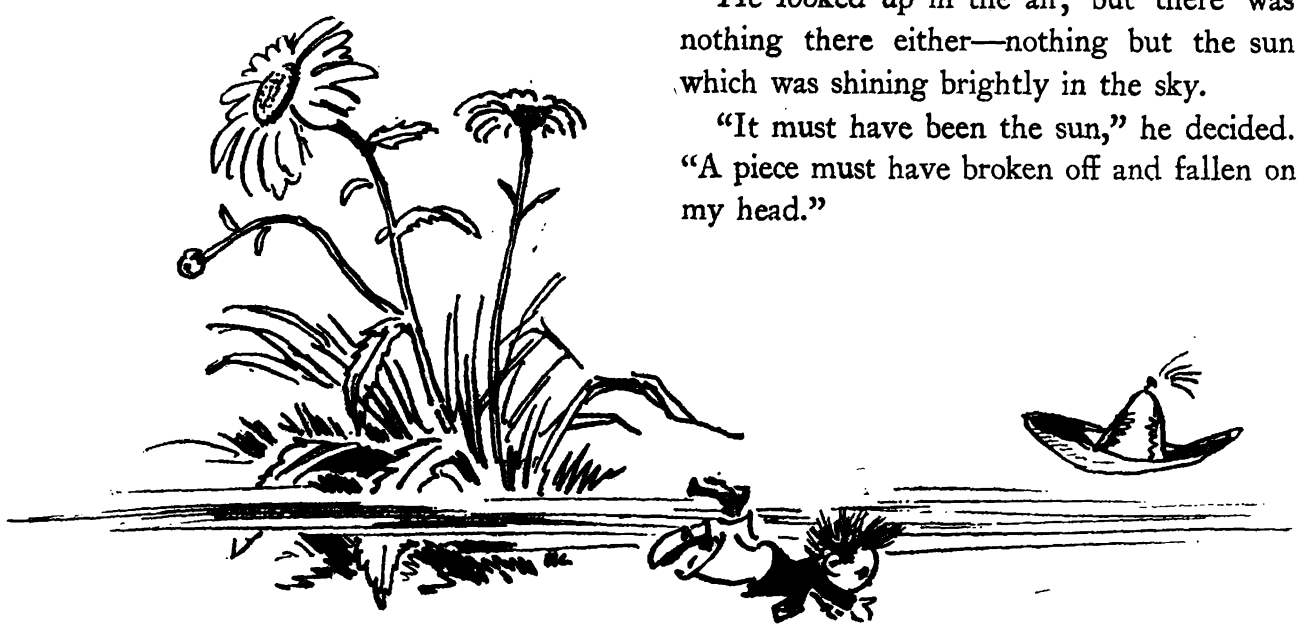
Dunno had a friend named Gunky who lived in Daisy Lane. He and Dunno would sit and talk for hours on end. They quarrelled twenty times a day, but they always made it up.

One day something happened to Dunno that made him the talk of the town. He had gone for a walk in the fields all by himself. Suddenly a cockchafer came flying past and struck him on the back of the head. Dunno turned a somersault in the air and fell flat on the ground. The cockchafer kept on flying and was soon out of sight. Dunno jumped up and looked round to see what had struck him, but there was nothing to be seen.

"What could have hit me?" he thought. "Something must have fallen on me."

He looked up in the air, but there was nothing there either—nothing but the sun which was shining brightly in the sky.

"It must have been the sun," he decided. "A piece must have broken off and fallen on my head."



He turned round and set out for home, and on the way he met a friend named Glass-Eye.

Glass-Eye was a famous astronomer. He knew how to make magnifying glasses out of bits of broken bottle. Everything looked bigger when seen through these glasses. By putting several of them together he had made a telescope with which he studied the moon and the stars.

"Glass-Eye," said Dunno, "a very strange thing has happened. A piece of the sun dropped off and hit me on the head."

"What are you saying?" laughed Glass-Eye. "If a piece of the sun had hit you, it would have smashed you to smithereens. The sun is enormous. It's even bigger than our earth."

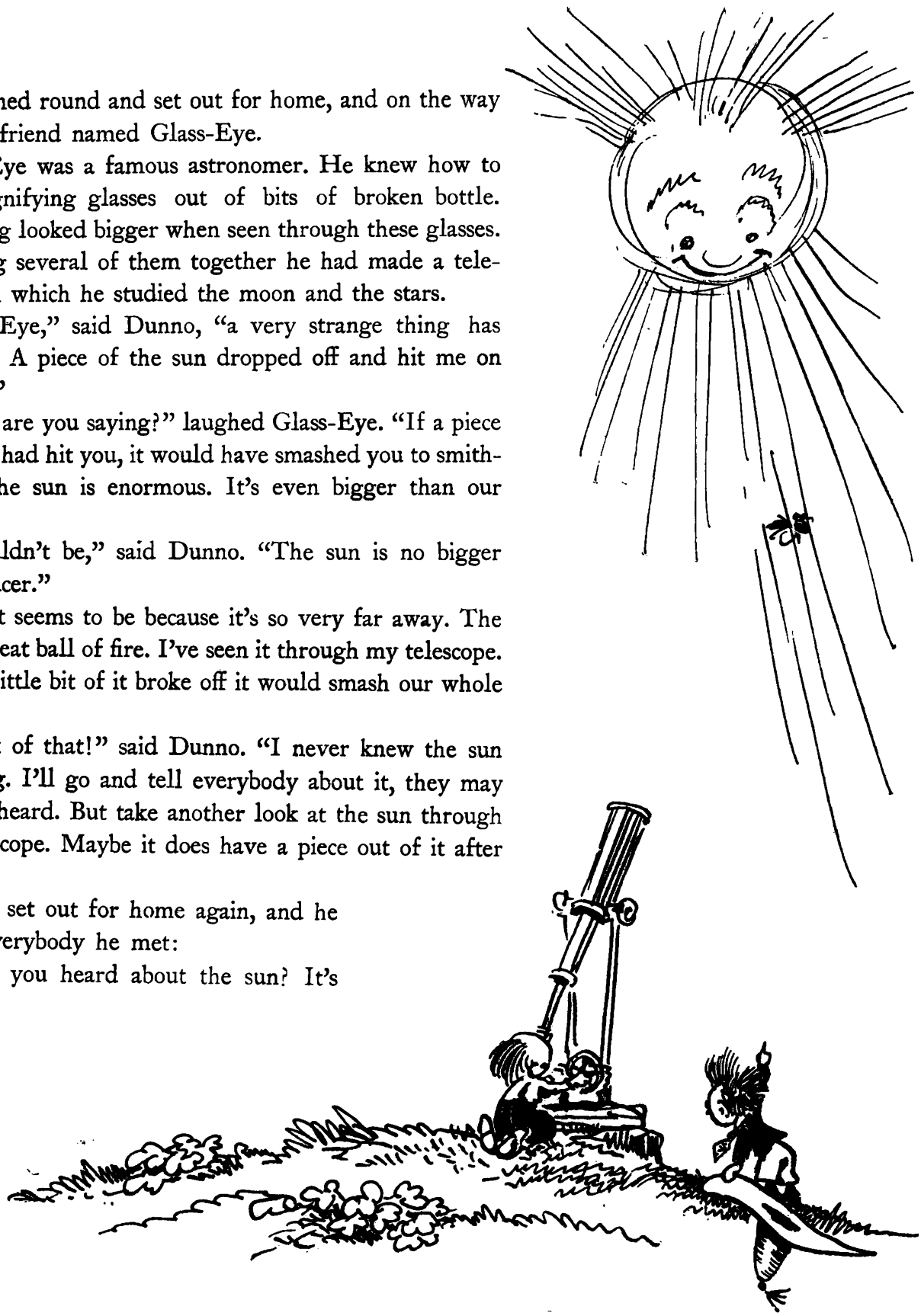
"It couldn't be," said Dunno. "The sun is no bigger than a saucer."

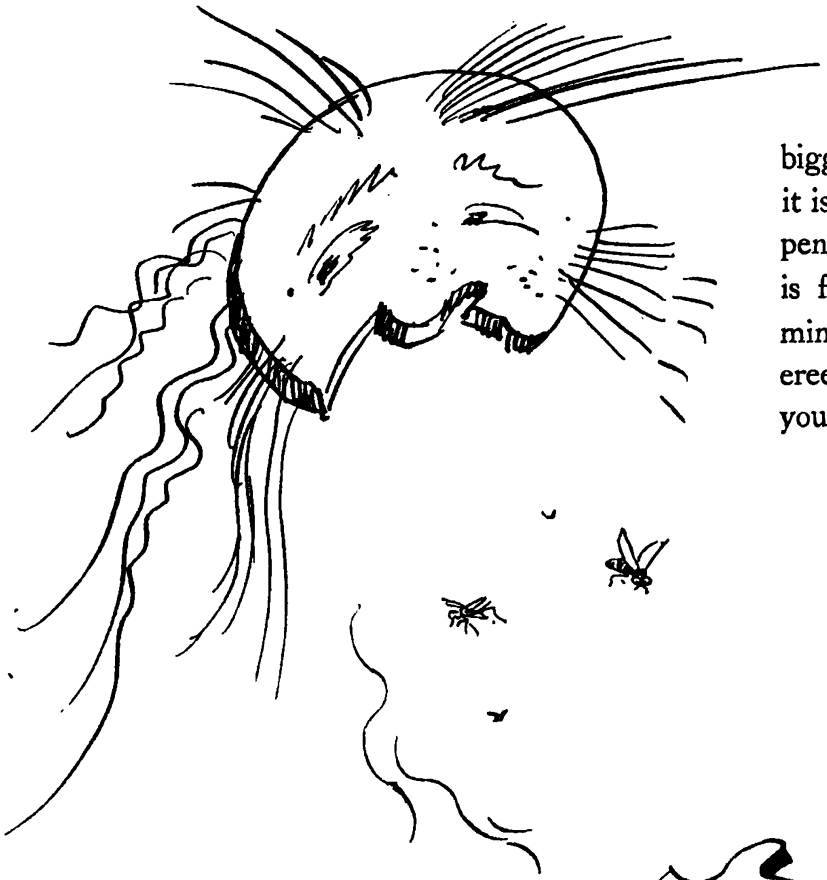
"It just seems to be because it's so very far away. The sun is a great ball of fire. I've seen it through my telescope. If just a little bit of it broke off it would smash our whole town."

"Think of that!" said Dunno. "I never knew the sun was so big. I'll go and tell everybody about it, they may not have heard. But take another look at the sun through your telescope. Maybe it does have a piece out of it after all."

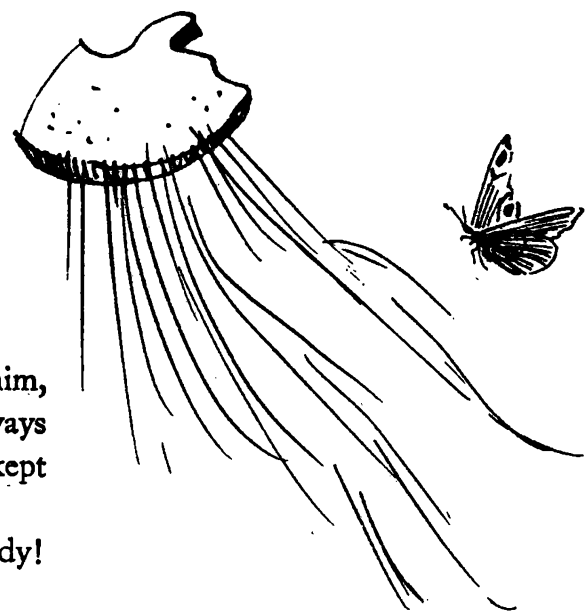
Dunno set out for home again, and he said to everybody he met:

"Have you heard about the sun? It's





bigger than our whole earth. Yes, it is! And a terrible thing has happened: a piece has broken off and is falling on us. It'll strike any minute and smash us all to smithereens. Go and ask Glass-Eye if you don't believe me."



Everybody laughed at him, because they knew he was always making up stories. But Dunno kept shouting as he ran home:

"Save yourselves, everybody! A piece of the sun is falling!"

"A piece of what?"

"Of the sun! Hurry up! It'll strike any minute, and that'll be the end of us! You don't know what the sun is! It's bigger than our earth!"

"Nonsense!"

"No nonsense at all! Glass-Eye told me so. He saw it through his telescope!"

Everybody rushed outdoors and looked up at the sun. They looked at it until their eyes began to water. They looked at it until there really did seem to be a piece out of it.

"Save yourselves!" shouted Dunno. "Save yourselves as best you can!"

The Mites ran for their things. Blobs snatched up his paints and brushes, Trills snatched up his fiddle and banjo and French horn. Dr. Pillman rushed about the house searching for his medicine bag, which had got mislaid. Roly-Poly snatched up his galoshes and umbrella and was just dashing through the gate when he heard Doono call out:

"Steady there now! What are you afraid of? You know what a nit-wit Dunno is. This is just one of his ideas."

"Ideas!" cried Dunno. "Go and ask Glass-Eye, I tell you."

So they all ran to Glass-Eye and found out that it was, indeed, only something Dunno had made up. How they did laugh!

"How could we have believed such a silly thing?" they said.

"How, indeed?" said Dunno. "Why, I even believed it myself!"

That's the sort of funny fellow Dunno was!

Chapter Two

DUNNO TAKES MUSIC LESSONS

Dunno never could do anything right. He never got beyond reading in syllables, and he could only write printed letters. Some people said his head was empty, but that was not true, because he could not have thought *at all* if it had been empty. To be sure, he did not think *much*, but he put his boots on his feet and not on his head, and it takes some thinking to do even that.

He was not a bad chap, all the same. He wanted to learn, but he did not want to work. He wanted to learn without trying, and of course not even the smartest of the Mites could do that.

The boy-Mites and girl-Mites dearly loved music, and Trills was a very good musician. He had all sorts of musical instruments and often played them. People praised him very much for his playing. This made Dunno jealous, and one day he said to him:

"Teach me to play. I want to be a musician, too."

"Very well," said Trills. "What instrument do you want to play?"

"Which is the easiest?"

"The banjo."

"Give it to me, and I'll try it."

Trills gave him a banjo. Dunno strummed on it a bit and then said:

"It doesn't make enough noise. Give me something louder."

Trills gave him a fiddle. Dunno sawed away for a little while and then said:

"Haven't you something louder?"

"I have a horn," said Trills.

"Let me try that."

Trills gave him a big brass horn. Dunno blew as hard as he could, and it let out a harsh blare.

"That's a good instrument," said Dunno. "It makes a lot of noise."

"Very well, learn to play the horn if you want to."

"Why should I learn?" said Dunno. "I know how without learning."

"No, you don't," said Trills.

"Yes, I do! Listen!" and he blew the horn with all his might.

Bo-o-o-m! Ba-a-m!

"You're just blowing. You're not playing," said Trills.

"Not playing?" said Dunno sharply. "I'm playing very well. I'm making a lot of noise."

"You don't want to make noise, you want to make *music*."

"This is music."

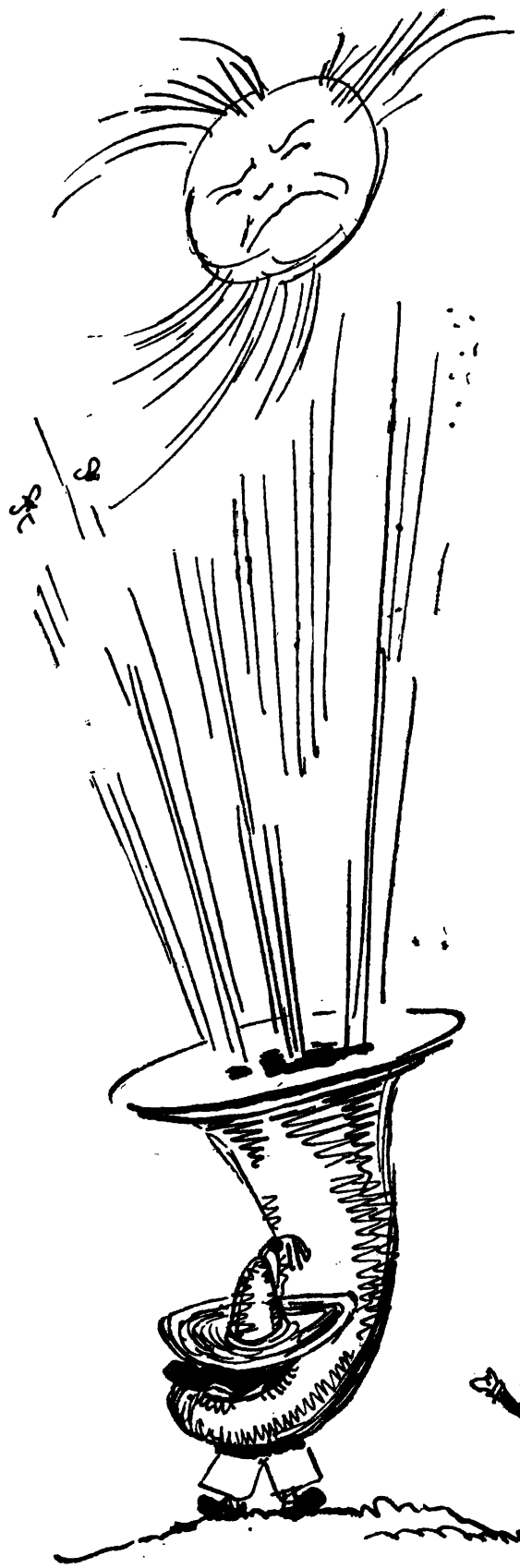
"No, it isn't," said Trills. "I can see you have no ear for music."

"You haven't got an ear yourself," said Dunno angrily. "You're jealous, that's all. You're afraid somebody else'll get some of the praise you like so much."

"That's not true," said Trills. "Take the horn and play as much as you like, if you think you don't have to learn. We'll see how people will praise you!"

"That's just what I'll do," said Dunno.

And he took the horn and began to blow. Since he did not know how, the horn blared and coughed and wheezed. When Trills could stand it no longer, he put on his velvet jacket and the pink bow he wore instead of a necktie, and went to see a friend.



That evening, when everybody was at home, Dunno took out the horn and began to blow it again.

Boom-boom-boom-boom!

"What's that noise?" they cried.

"It's not a noise," said Dunno, "it's me playing."

"Stop it this very minute," said Doono. "It gives me a headache."

"That's just because you aren't used to it. Once you get used to it, it won't give you a headache."

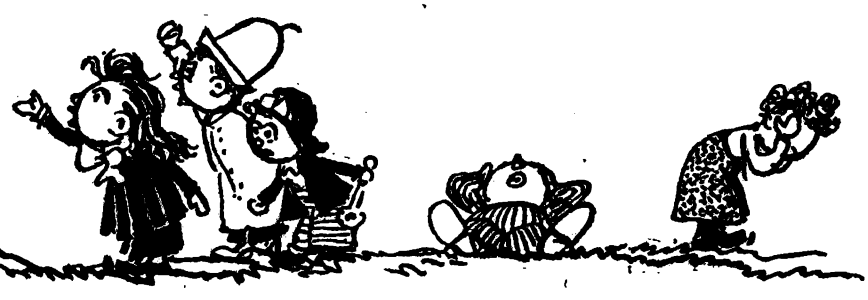
"But I don't want to get used to it."

But Dunno went on blowing.

Boom-boom-girrr-girrr-boom-boom!

"Stop it!" cried all the Mites. "Get out of here with that horrid horn of yours!"

"Where shall I go?"



"Go out into the fields and play there."

"No one will hear me out there."

"Must you have someone hear you?"

"Of course I must."

"Then go outdoors and play to the neighbours."

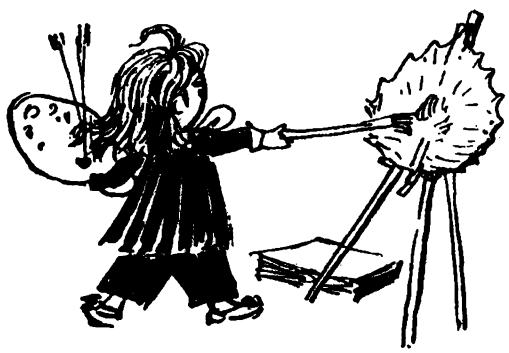
Dunno went out and began to blow his horn in front of the house next door. The neighbours came out and asked him not to make so much noise. He went to another house, but was sent away from there, too. When the same thing happened at a third house, he blew for all he was worth just for spite. This made all the people angry. They came rushing out of their houses and drove him away. It was all he could do to escape them with his horn.

And he has not played it since.

"Nobody appreciates my music," he said. "They haven't grown up to it yet. When they grow up to it they'll want to hear it, but it will be too late. I won't play for them."

Chapter Three

HOW DUNNO BECAME AN ARTIST



Blobs was a very good artist. He always wore a long shirt called a smock. He looked very splendid standing in front of his easel, palette in hand, in his smock, and with his long hair thrown back. Anyone could see he was a real artist.

When the Mites refused to listen to Dunno's music, he decided to become an artist. One day he came to Blobs and said:

"Listen, Blobs, I've decided to be an artist. Give me some paints and a brush."

Blobs, who was very generous, gave Dunno all his old paints and brushes. Just at that moment Dunno's friend Gunky came to see him.

"Sit down, Gunky," said Dunno, "and I'll paint your picture."

Gunky was only too glad to have his picture painted. He sat down and Dunno set to work. He wanted to make Gunky handsomer than he really was, and so he gave him a red nose, green ears, blue lips, and orange eyes. Gunky was anxious to see his portrait. He was so anxious that he kept fidgeting on his chair.

"If you don't stop fidgeting, the picture won't look like you at all," said Dunno.

"Does it look like me now?" asked Gunky.

"Very much," said Dunno as he painted in a purple moustache.

"May I see it?" asked Gunky when the portrait was finished.

Dunno showed it to him.

"Do I look like *that*?" cried the startled Gunky.

"Of course you do."

"What did you give me a moustache for? I haven't got a moustache."

"Well, you will have some day."

"And why did you paint my nose red?"

"To make it prettier."

"And my hair blue? Is my hair really blue?"

"Yes, it is," said Dunno, "but if you don't like it, I can make it green."

"It's a very bad portrait," said Gunky. "Here, I'll tear it up."

"I won't let you tear up a work of art," said Dunno.

Gunky tried to take the portrait away from him and they had a tussle. They made such a lot of noise that Doono and Dr. Pillman, and some other Mites came running.

"What are you fighting over?" they asked.

"Look at this," said Gunky. "Whose portrait is it? Does it look like me?"

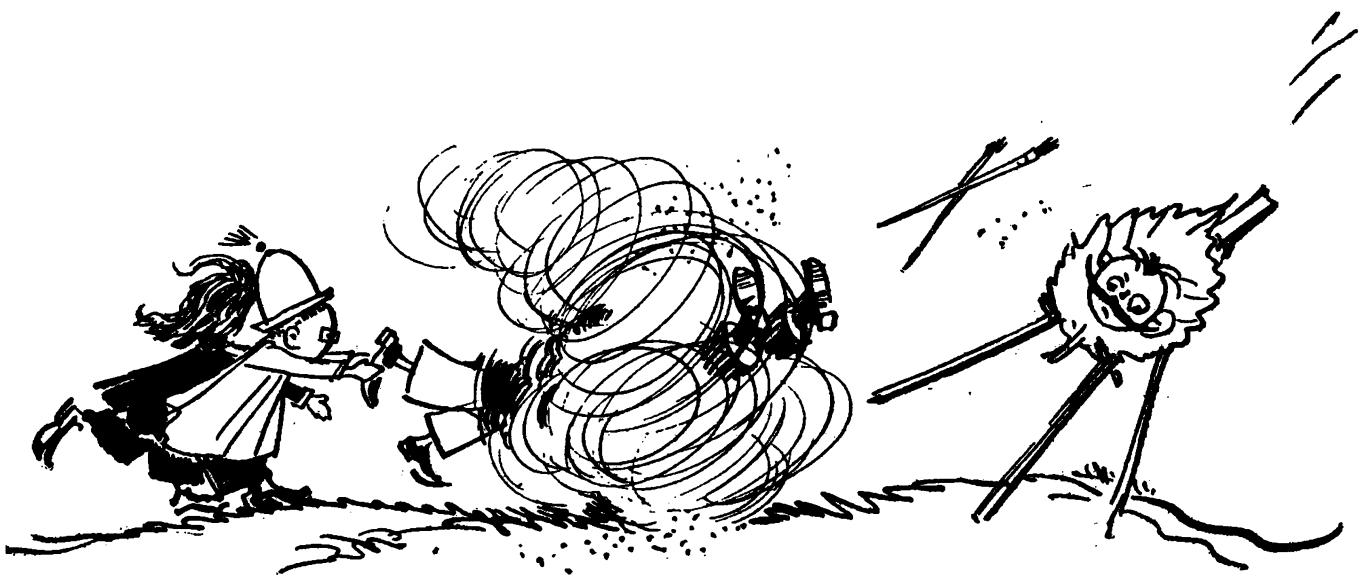
"Not in the least," answered the Mites. "It looks like a scarecrow."

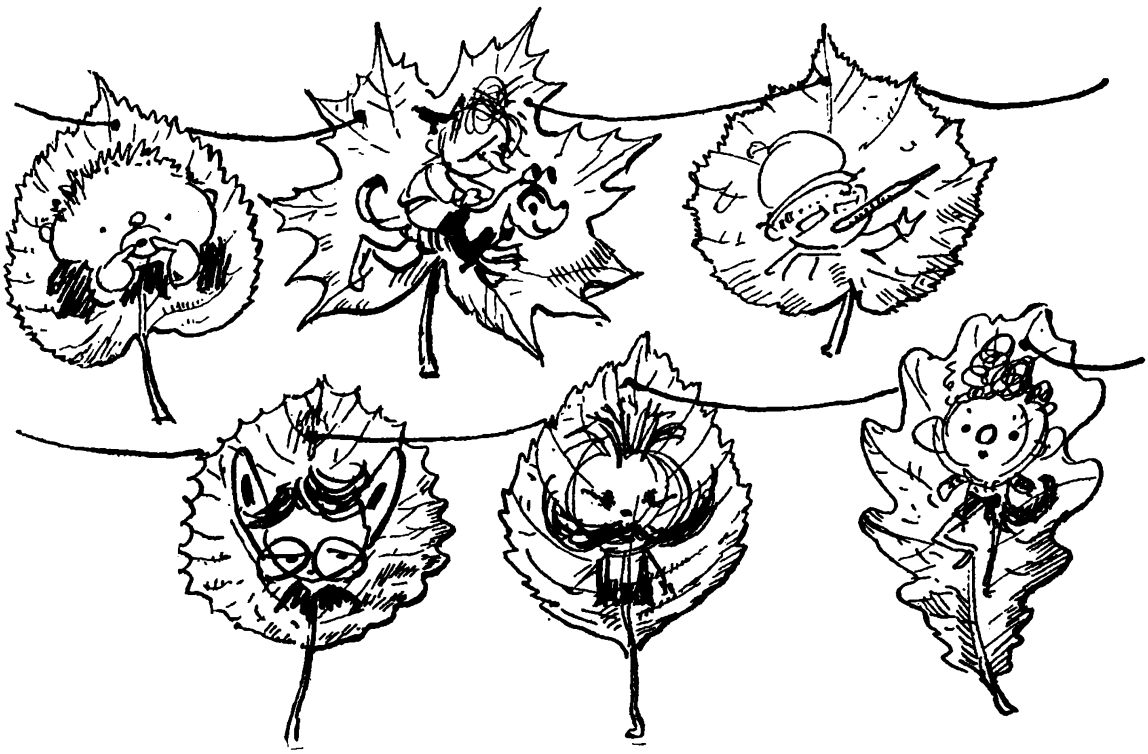
"That's just because it has no name on it," said Dunno. "If I put a name on it you'd see who it was straight off."

He picked up a pencil and wrote in big printed letters: "GUNKY." Then he hung the picture on the wall.

"Let it hang here where everybody can see it," he said.

"I will not," said Gunky. "As soon as you go to bed I'll take it down and tear it up."





"I won't go to bed, I'll stay up all night and watch it," said Dunno.

Gunky was so angry that he slammed the door and went home.

Dunno did stay up all night. When everybody else was asleep, he painted pictures of all his friends. He painted Roly-Poly so fat that he couldn't get him all in the picture. He painted Swifty with long skinny legs and a dog's tail. He painted Shot astride his dog Dot. He gave Dr. Pillman a thermometer instead of a nose. He painted donkey-ears on Doono. In a word, he made them all look very foolish. In the morning he wrote names on all the pictures and hung them up. It was a real picture gallery.

The first to wake up was Dr. Pillman. As soon as he saw the paintings he began to laugh. He liked them so much that he put on his spectacles to get a better look at them. He examined each picture in turn, laughing very hard.

"Good for Dunno!" he said. "I never had such a good laugh in my life!"

At last he came to his own picture.

"Who is this?" he asked in a stern voice. "Me? It couldn't be me. No likeness at all. Take it down."

"Why?" asked Dunno. "Let it hang there with the others."

"You must be mad, Dunno!" said Dr. Pillman angrily. "Or, perhaps, there's something wrong with your eyes. What makes you think I have a thermometer instead of a nose? I'll have to give you a big dose of castor oil tonight when you go to bed."

Dunno disliked castor oil very much.

"Please don't," he whimpered. "I can see for myself that the picture isn't like you." And he took it down and tore it up.

The next one to wake up was Shot. He, too, liked the pictures. He almost died laughing. But the minute his eyes fell on his own, he stopped laughing.

"Very bad," he said. "It doesn't look like me. If you don't take it down I'll never let you go hunting with me again."

And so Dunno had to take Shot's picture down, too.

The same thing happened with the others. Each of the Mites liked everyone's portrait but his own.

The last of the Mites to wake up was Blobs, who always slept later than anyone else. When he saw his picture on the wall he was furious and said it was no portrait at all—just a mess of paint that had nothing

to do with art. He tore it down and took his paints and brushes away from Dunno.

Gunky's portrait was the only one that was left hanging on the wall. Dunno took it down and went to see his friend.

"You can have your picture if you want it, Gunky!" he said. "And then you and I will be friends again."

Gunky took the portrait and tore it in little pieces.

"Very well, let's be friends," he said, "but promise never to paint me again."

"I'll never paint *anybody* again," said Dunno. "What's the use? You try so hard, and get nothing but blame. I don't want to be an artist any more."

Chapter Four

HOW DUNNO BECAME A POET

When nothing came of Dunno's efforts to become an artist, he decided to become a poet. He knew a poet who lived in Dandelion Street. The real name of this poet was Turnips, but since all poets like to have beautiful names, he chose another for himself. He called himself Posey.

One day Dunno went to see Posey and said to him: "Teach me how to write, Posey. I want to be a poet."

"Have you any talent?" asked Posey.

"Of course I have. I'm very talented," said Dunno.

"We shall see about that," said Posey. "Do you know how a rhyme is made?"

"A rhyme? What's that?"

"A rhyme is made by finding words that end in the same sound, like 'tickle, pickle,' 'berry, cherry.' Is that clear?"

"It is."

"Then give me a rhyme for 'waiter'."

"'Mister'," said Dunno.

"Silly," said Posey. "'Mister' doesn't rhyme with 'waiter'."

"Why not?" said Dunno. "They both end in the same sound."

"Not just the last sound—next to the last has to rhyme too, like: mother, brother; simple, pimple; tender, fender."

"Oh, I see!" cried Dunno. "Mother, brother; simple, pimple; tender, fender. That's lots of fun!"

"Then think of a rhyme for 'scissors'," said Posey.

"Zizzers," said Dunno.

"What are zizzers?" asked Posey. "There is no such word as zizzers."

"Isn't there?"

"Of course, there isn't."

"Then 'fizzers'."

"What are fizzers?" asked Posey, more surprised than ever.

"Fizzers? Why, things that fiz."

"You just made that up," said Posey. "There is no such word. You've got to choose real words, and not just make up any odd word."

"And what if I can't choose a real word?"

"That means you have no poetic talent."

"Very well, you think of a rhyme for scissors," said Dunno.

"Just a minute," said Posey.

He stood in the middle of the room, crossed his arms on his chest, cocked his head on one side, and began to think. Then he threw back his head and stared at the ceiling and thought. Then he took his chin in his hands and stared at the floor and thought. When he had done all this he began to walk up and down, muttering to himself:

"Scissors, mizzers, bizzers, nizzers, rizzers...." He went on muttering for a long time, and at last he said: "Oh, bother it! There just isn't any rhyme to that word!"

"You see!" gloated Dunno. "You yourself gave me a word that has no rhyme and then you say I have no talent!"

"Maybe you have, but for goodness' sake leave me alone," said Posey. "My head's going round. Write anything you like as long as it rhymes and makes sense, and that will be a poem."

"Is it really so easy?" said Dunno.

"Yes, all you need is talent."

Dunno went home, and as soon as he got there he sat down and began to write poetry. All day long he walked up and down, staring now at the floor, now at the ceiling, holding his chin in his hands, and muttering to himself. At last the poems were ready.

"Listen, everybody!" he said. "I've written some poems."

"How nice! What are your poems about?" said his friends.

"About you," said Dunno. "The first one's about Doono:

Doono went out for a walk one day.
And jumped over a lamb that stood in his way."

"What?" cried Doono. "When did I ever jump over a lamb?"

"That's just for the sake of the rhyme," explained Dunno.

"And for the sake of the rhyme you mean to make up all sorts of fibs about me?" said the infuriated Doono.

"Yes, I do," said Dunno. "I could not make up true things, could I?"

"You just try doing it again!" warned Doono. "Have you made up fibs about the others, too?"

"Here's one about Swifty:

Hungry Swifty, I am told,
Ate an iron that was cold."

"Hear that?" cried Swifty. "Hear what he says about me? I never ate a cold iron in my life!"

"Don't shout. I said it was cold just for the sake of the rhyme."

"But I never ate a hot one, either," cried Swifty.

"Well, I didn't say you ate a hot one, so there's nothing for you to get excited about," said Dunno. "Now listen to my poem about P'raps:

Under his pillow P'raps found
A cake that weighed a half a pound."

P'raps ran over to his bed and looked under the pillow.

"There's no cake under my pillow," he said.

"You don't understand poetry," said Dunno. "Of course, there's no cake there. I just said there was for the sake of the rhyme. I've written a poem about Dr. Pillman too."

"We've got to put a stop to this, friends," cried Dr. Pillman. "Are we to stand calmly by and let him go on telling fibs about us?"

"No, we aren't!" agreed everybody. "We won't have any more of it! They aren't poems at all. He's just making fun of us."

But Doono, Swifty, and P'raps wanted to hear the other poems.

"Let him read them," they said. "If he read about us, why shouldn't he read about you?"

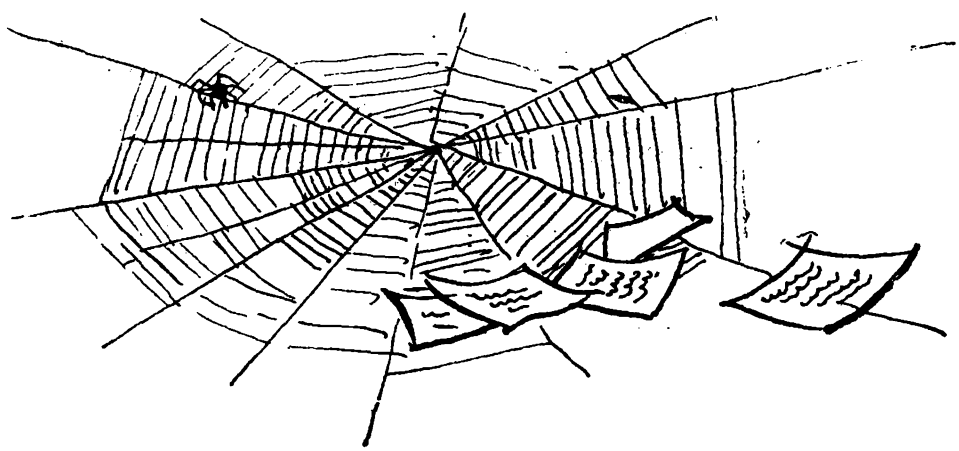
"We won't have it! We won't listen!" they cried.

"Very well, if you don't want to listen, I'll go and read them to the neighbours," said Dunno.

"What!" they cried. "Disgrace us in front of the neighbours! If you do, you had better not come home!"

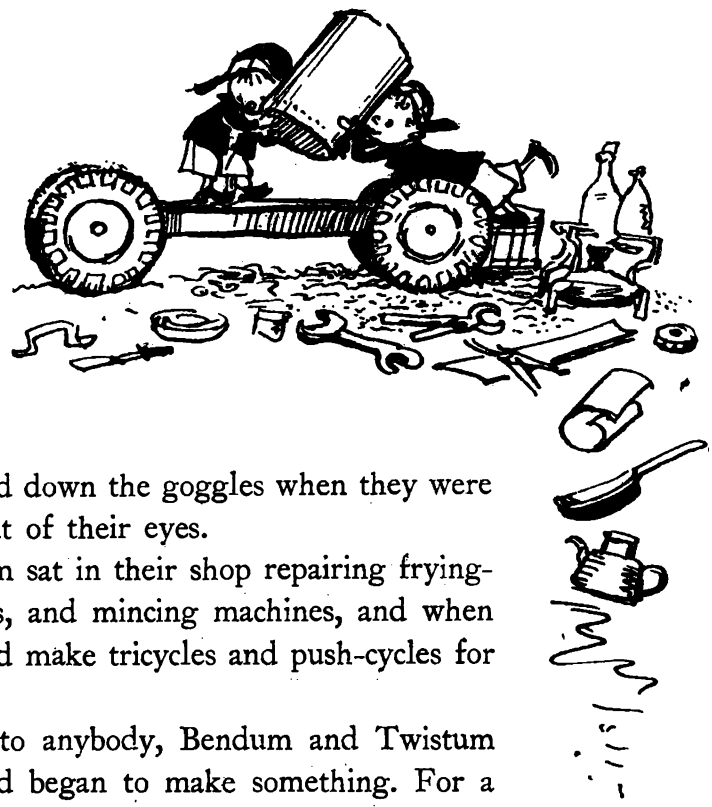
"Oh, all right, I won't then," said Dunno. "Don't be angry with me."

And he resolved never to write another poem.



Chapter Five

HOW DUNNO TOOK A RIDE IN A SODA-WATER CAR



Bendum and his helper Twistum were very good tinkers. They looked exactly alike, except that Bendum was the least bit taller and Twistum was the least bit shorter. Both of them wore leather jackets, and in their pockets they always carried files, wrenches, screw-drivers, and other tools. If the pockets hadn't been made of leather they would have been torn off long ago. Their caps were also made of leather and they had goggles on them. Bendum and Twistum pulled down the goggles when they were working to keep the dust and dirt out of their eyes.

All day long Bendum and Twistum sat in their shop repairing frying-pans, saucepans, tea-kettles, oil stoves, and mincing machines, and when they had nothing to repair they would make tricycles and push-cycles for the boy-Mites.

One day, without saying a word to anybody, Bendum and Twistum shut themselves up in their shop and began to make something. For a whole month they hammered and sawed and filed and soldered without showing anybody what they were working on, and when the month was up it turned out they had made a motor car.

This motor car ran on a mixture of soda-water and syrup. In the middle of the car was a seat for the driver, and in front of this seat was the soda-water tank. The soda-water ran out of the tank into a pipe leading to a brass cylinder with a piston in it. Under the pressure of the soda-water the piston went up and down, up and down, and made the wheels go round. Above the driver's seat was another tank with syrup in it that ran down through a pipe and greased the engine. Soda-water cars of this sort were very popular among the Mites. But the car that Bendum and

Twistum made had one very important improvement: there was a little rubber tube hanging out of the soda-water tank so that the driver could take a sip whenever he wanted it without stopping the car.

Swifty learned to drive the car, and if anyone asked him for a ride, he never refused.

Treacly-Sweeter asked more often than anyone else because he knew he could drink as much soda-water as he liked in the car. Dunno also enjoyed a ride. But Dunno wanted to learn to drive himself, and one day he said to Swifty:

"Let me steer."

"You don't know how," said Swifty. "This is a motor car and you've got to know how to handle it."

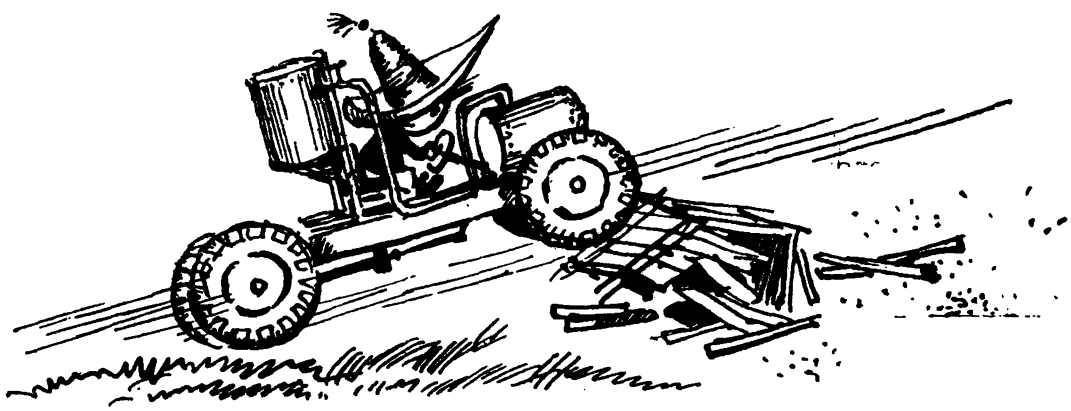
"What's there to know?" Dunno said. "I've seen what you do—just pull levers and turn the wheel. It's very simple."

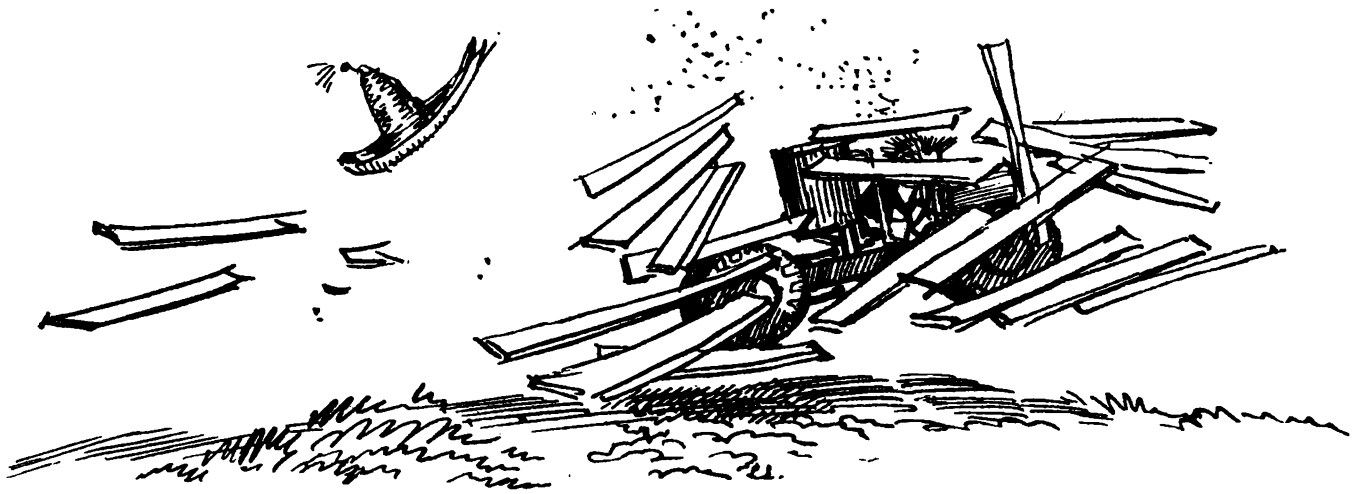
"It looks simple, but it's really very hard. You'll kill yourself and smash the car."

"All right, Swifty," said Dunno sulkily, "the next time you ask me for something I won't give it to you either."

One day when Swifty was out Dunno saw the car standing in the yard. He climbed into it and began pulling levers and pressing pedals. At first nothing happened, but all of a sudden the car gave a sputter and began to move. Some Mites who were looking out of the window saw this and ran out of the house.

"What are you doing?" they cried. "You'll run into something!"





"No, I won't," said Dunno, but at that very moment he ran into the dog-kennel and smashed it to bits. Fortunately Dot was not inside, or he would have been smashed too.

"Just look what you've done!" cried Doono. "Stop the car this very minute!"

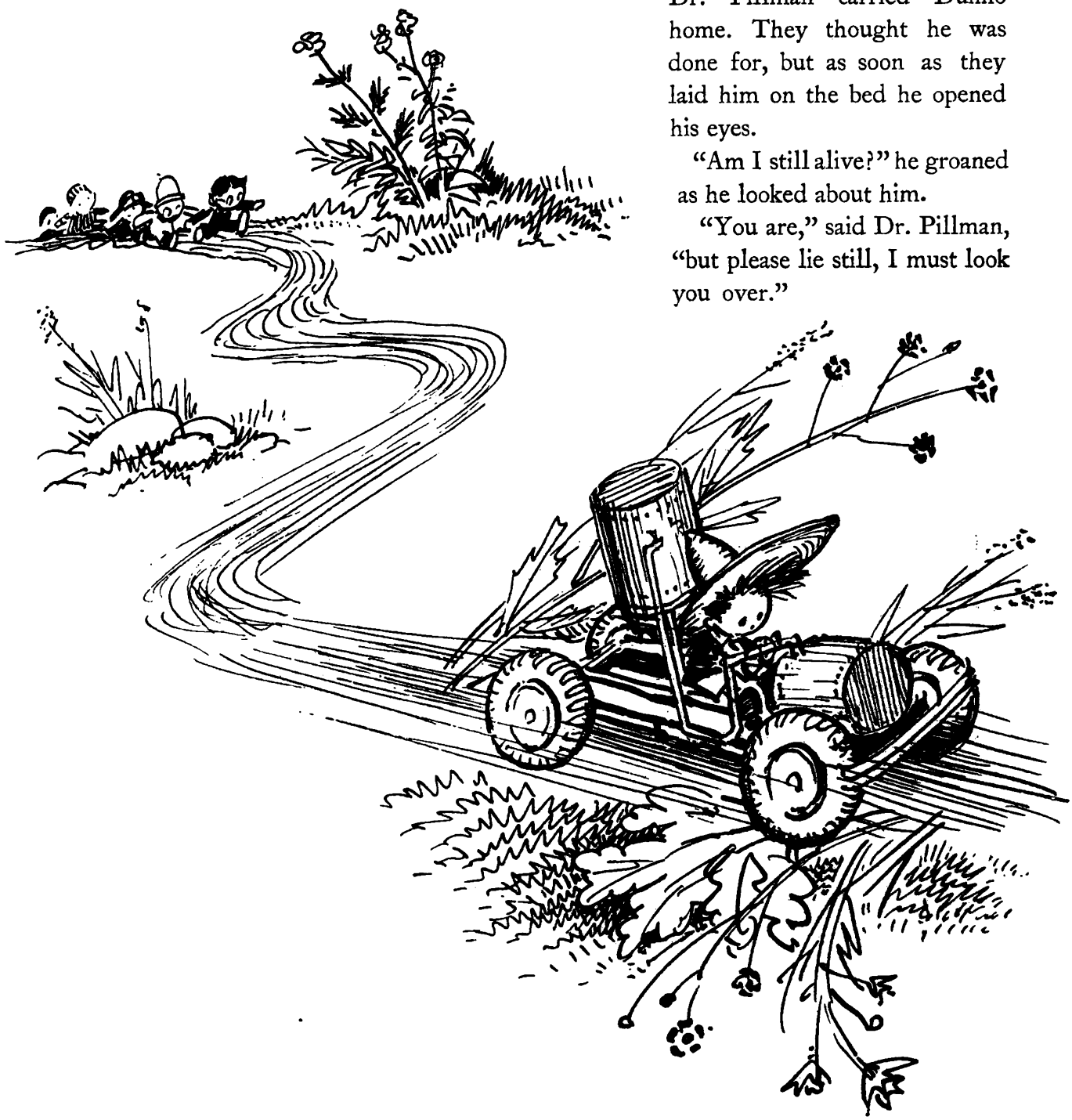
Dunno was frightened. He wanted to stop the car, but he didn't know how. He pulled this lever and that, but instead of stopping, the car went faster than ever. There was a summer-house standing in the yard. Bang! Crash! The summer-house lay in ruins. Boards came falling about Dunno's ears. One of them struck him on the back, another on the head. He kept turning the steering-wheel back and forth.

"Open the gates or I'll smash everything!" he called out as the car raced round the yard.

The Mites opened the gates and Dunno drove the car into the street. There was such a commotion that all the townsfolk came running out of their houses.

"Out of the way!" shouted Dunno as the car tore along.

Doono, Benum, P'raps, Dr. Pillman, and some other Mites ran after it but they couldn't catch up. Dunno went tearing about the town, unable to stop the car. At last it headed for the river and tumbled headlong down the steep bank. Dunno fell out and lay unconscious on the river-bank. The car sank to the bottom of the river.



Doono, Bendum, P'raps, and Dr. Pillman carried Dunno home. They thought he was done for, but as soon as they laid him on the bed he opened his eyes.

"Am I still alive?" he groaned as he looked about him.

"You are," said Dr. Pillman, "but please lie still, I must look you over."

He undressed Dunno and examined him.

"Strange as it may seem, not a bone is broken," he said when he had finished. "But you have a few splinters in you."

"A board caught me on the back," explained Dunno.

"I'll have to take the splinters out," said Dr. Pillman, shaking his head.

"Will it hurt?" asked the frightened Dunno.

"Not at all. Here, I'll take the biggest one out first."

"Ouch!" cried Dunno.

"Why, did it hurt?" asked Dr. Pillman in surprise.

"Of course it did!"

"Well, you'll have to grin and bear it. It doesn't *really* hurt."

"It does so! Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!"

"Anyone would think I was cutting your throat, the way you shout! What are you shouting for?"

"It hurts! You said it wouldn't, but is does!"

"Don't make so much noise. There's only one splinter left."

"Leave it there. I don't mind having one splinter in me."

"I can't. It'll fester."

"Ouch! Oooo!"

"That's all. I'll just paint it with iodine and everything's over."

"Will the iodine hurt?"

"Oh, no. Iodine doesn't hurt. Lie still."

"O-o-u-u-ch!"

"Come, now! If you're so fond of riding in cars, you've got to take the consequences."

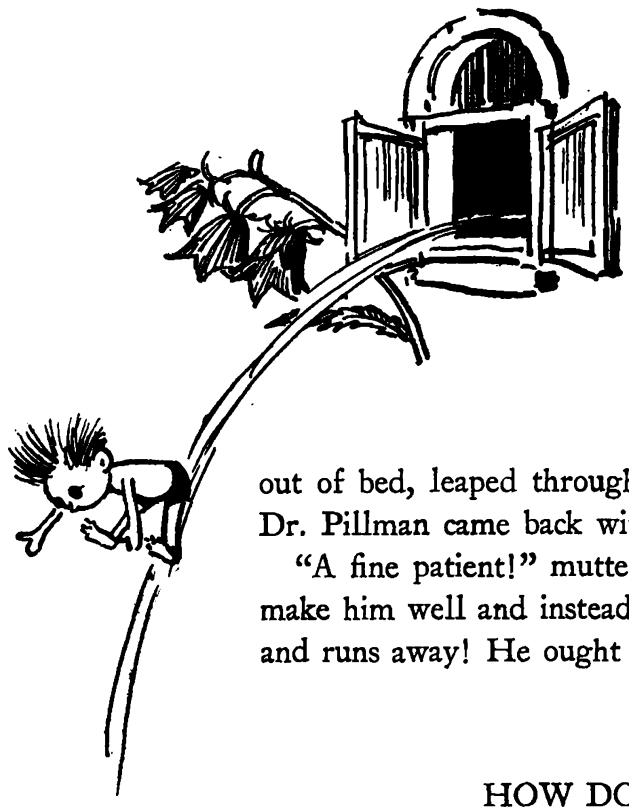
"Oh, oh! It stings!"

"It won't last long. Now I must take your temperature."

"Oh, don't! Please don't!"

"Why not?"

"It'll hurt."



"It doesn't hurt to have your temperature taken."

"You always say it doesn't hurt, but it always does."

"Silly! Haven't I ever taken your temperature before?"

"No, you haven't."

"Well, now you'll see it really doesn't hurt," said the doctor, and he went to get the thermometer.

As soon as he was gone Dunno jumped out of bed, leaped through the window, and ran off to Gunky's. When Dr. Pillman came back with the thermometer, Dunno was gone.

"A fine patient!" muttered the doctor. "Here I am doing my best to make him well and instead of thanking me, he jumps out of the window and runs away! He ought to be ashamed of himself!"

Chapter Six

HOW DOONO MADE A BALLOON

Doono, who was a great reader, had read a lot of travel books. Often of an evening he would tell his friends about what he had read. The Mites loved to listen to his stories. They liked to hear about countries they had never seen, but they liked even better to hear stories about famous travellers, for the most extraordinary things always happen to travellers.

After listening to a number of such stories, the Mites decided to go on a long journey themselves. Some of them suggested taking the trip on foot, others suggested setting off down the river in boats.

But Doono said:

"Let's make a balloon and sail up in the air."

They were all delighted with this suggestion. None of them had ever been up in the air, and they were sure it must be delightful. Of course, they had no idea how to make a balloon, but Doono said he would think it all out and tell them what they must do.

And so he began to think. He thought for three days and three nights, and in the end decided to make the balloon out of rubber. The Mites had rubber. There were many plants that resembled rubber plants growing in their town. They made little slits in the stems and gathered the sap that flowed out. Gradually the sap thickened and turned into rubber, out of which they made rubber balls and galoshes.

As soon as Doono decided to make the balloon out of rubber, he sent the Mites to gather sap and pour it into a big barrel he had got ready for the purpose. On the way to the rubber-trees Dunno met his friend Gunky skipping with two little girl-Mites.

"If you only knew what we were going to do, Gunky," said Dunno. "You'd die of envy!"

"I would not!" retorted Gunky. "I have no intention of dying."

"You would, you would!" sang Dunno. "If you only knew!"

"Well, what is it?" asked Gunky.

"We're going to make a balloon and sail up in the air!"

Gunky went green with envy. He wanted to boast of something himself, and so he said:

"Phooh, a balloon! What do I want with a balloon when I've got two girl-Mites to play with."

"Who are they?" asked Dunno.

"These," said Gunky, pointing to his playmates. "That one is called Pee-Wee and the other Tinkle."

Pee-Wee and Tinkle darted suspicious glances at Dunno.

Dunno glared at them.

"So that's how it is!" he said to Gunky. "I thought you were *my* friend."

"I am," said Gunky. "And theirs, too. Can't I be friends with all of you?"

"No, you can't," said Dunno. "If you're a friend of girl-Mites, you're a girl-Mite yourself. Stop playing with them this very minute."

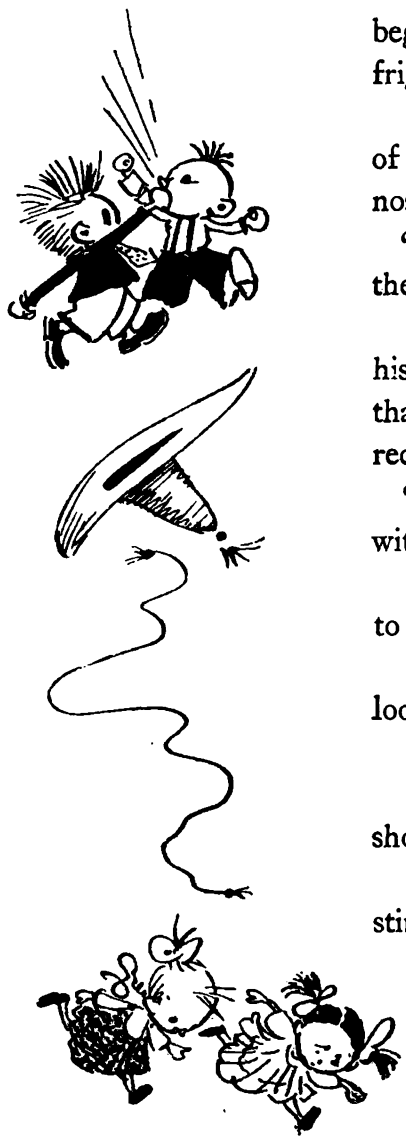
"Why should I?"

"Stop playing with them, I say, or you'll never play with *me* again."

"As if I cared!" said Gunky.

"And I'll give it to your Pee-Wee and Tinkle!"

Dunno clenched his fists and made for the girl-Mites. Gunky leaped in front of him and struck him on the jaw. They began to fight, and Pee-Wee and Tinkle were so frightened they ran away.



"So you gave me a sock in the jaw just on account of those girls?" said Dunno, aiming a blow at Gunky's nose.

"Why did you have to say such nasty things about them?" said Gunky, swinging his fists.

"Aren't you a hero!" said Dunno, and he struck his friend on the back of the head with such force that Gunky was almost knocked down. As soon as he recovered he took to his heels.

"It's all off between you and me! I won't play with you any more!" Dunno cried after him.

"Don't!" called back Gunky. "You'll be the first to come and make it up."

"No, I won't. We're going to sail away in a balloon!"

"Sail from the roof to the attic!"

"It's you who'll sail from the roof to the attic!" shouted Dunno, and he went off to gather sap.

When the barrel was filled to the top, Doono stirred it well and told Twistum to bring the pump

he used for pumping air into motor tyres. Doono fastened a long rubber hose to the pump, smeared rubber sap on the open end of the hose and told Twistum to begin pumping slowly. As Twistum pumped, the sap blew up like a soap bubble. Doono kept smearing this bubble with rubber sap on all sides and Twistum kept working the pump and little by little the bubble turned into a balloon. It got so big that Doono was unable to smear it on all sides, and so he told the other Mites to take brushes and help him. They all got busy. Everybody but Dunno found work to do. He just walked round and round the balloon at a safe distance, whistling a tune and muttering to himself from time to time:

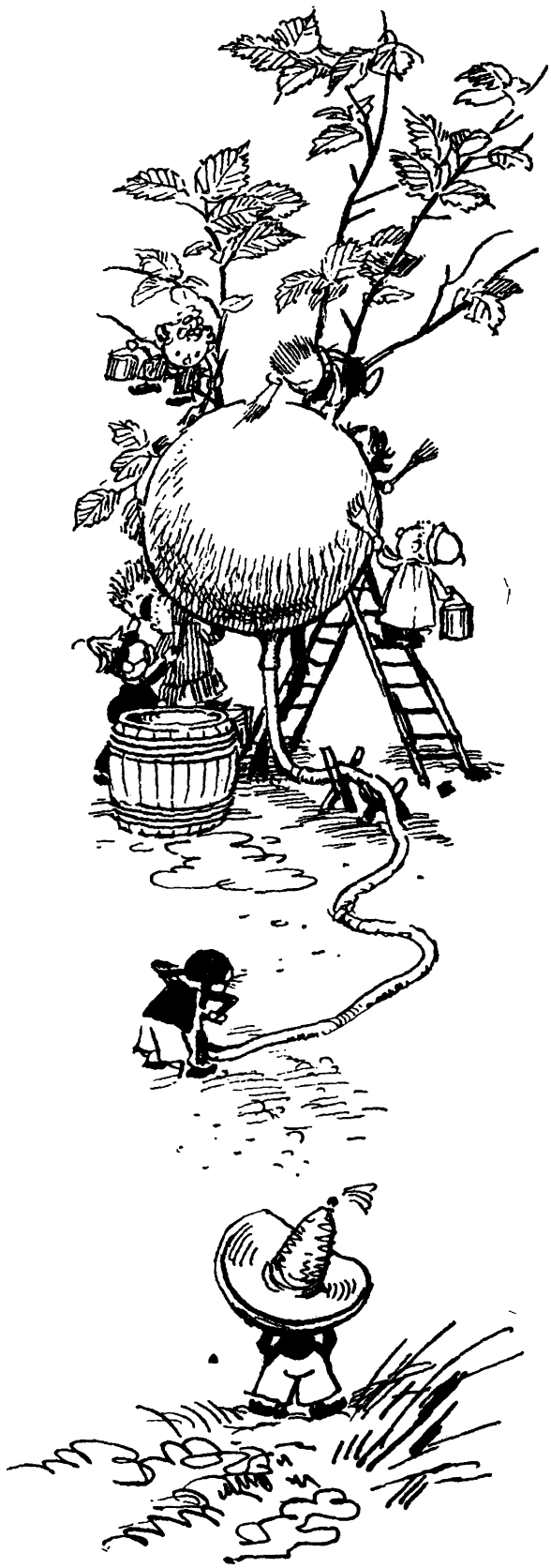
"It'll burst for sure ... any minute now it'll go bang."

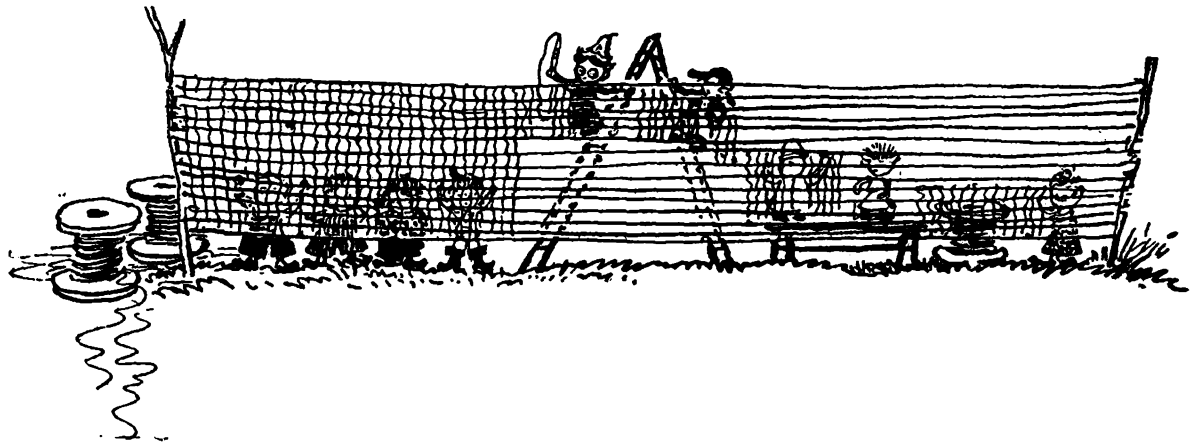
But it did not burst, it just grew bigger every minute. Soon it was so big that the Mites had to climb a hazel bush that was growing in the yard to smear the top and the sides.

They worked for two days, until the balloon was as big as a house. Then Doono tied up the opening with a cord to keep the air from leaking out, and said:

"We'll leave it here to dry while we do another job."

He tied the balloon to the bush so that the wind couldn't carry it away, and then divided the Mites into two groups. He sent one of them to gather silkworm





cocoons and make a big silk net, and he sent the other to make a big basket out of birch-bark.

While Doono and his friends were busy at their tasks, the rest of the Mites in Flower Town came to look at the balloon tied to the bush. Each of them wanted to touch it, and some even tried to lift it up.

"It's very light," they said. "You can lift it with one hand."

"Yes, it's light, but I'm afraid it'll never rise into the air," said a Mite named Sinker.

"Why not?" asked the others.

"If it was light enough it would rise now, and not lie here on the ground," said Sinker. "It's too heavy to be light."

The Mites thought this over.

"Hm, true enough," they said. "It's too heavy to be light. It would sail away if it weren't."

They began to question Doono, but he just said:

"Wait a while. Soon everything will be clear."

This made them doubt more than ever, and Sinker went about town spreading unpleasant rumours.

"What could possibly make that balloon rise?" he said. "Nothing could. Birds fly because they have wings, but nothing can make that balloon fly. It can only fall."

In a very short time nobody had any faith in the balloon. They made fun of it. They would come to Doono's house and gaze over the fence and say:

"Look, look! It's flying! Ha, ha, ha!"

But Doono paid no attention to their jeers. When the silk net was ready, he told them to throw it over the balloon.

"Look!" cried the Mites standing at the fence. "They've caught the balloon in a net! They're afraid it will fly away! Ha, ha, ha!"

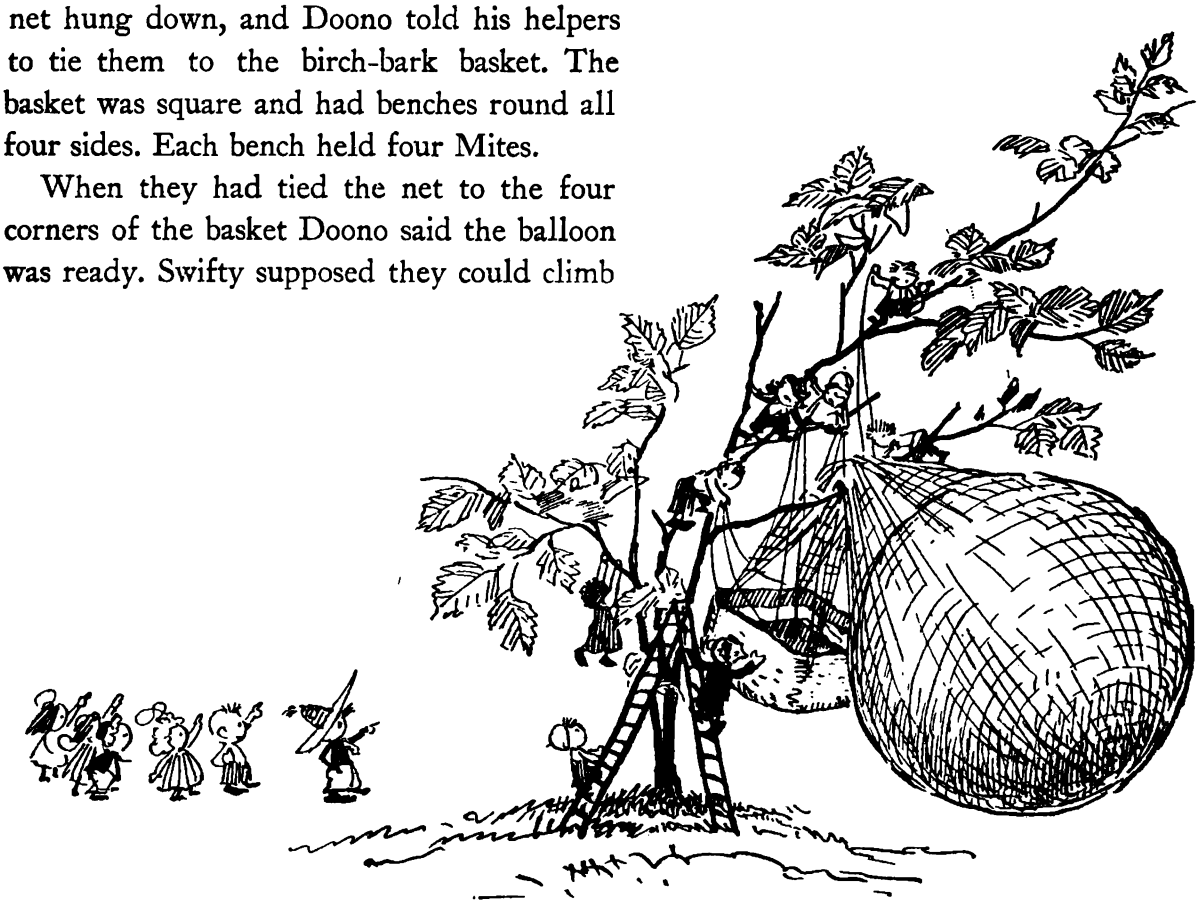
Doono told his helpers to tie one end of a rope to the opening of the balloon, so that they could pull it up off the ground. Swifty and Twistum did this, then climbed the hazel bush with the rope in their hands and began to pull. This made the onlookers laugh harder than ever.

"Ha, ha, ha! A fine sort of balloon that has to be pulled up on a rope! How will it sail in the air if it has to be pulled up on a rope?"

"Here's how!" said Sinker. "They'll sit astride the balloon and pull on the rope to make it go up."

When the balloon was lifted off the ground, the four corners of the net hung down, and Doono told his helpers to tie them to the birch-bark basket. The basket was square and had benches round all four sides. Each bench held four Mites.

When they had tied the net to the four corners of the basket Doono said the balloon was ready. Swifty supposed they could climb



in and sail away, but Doono said they had to make each of the Mites a parachute first.

"What for?" asked Dunno.

"What if the balloon should burst? You'd have to jump with parachutes."

The next day was spent in making parachutes. Doono told them how to make them out of dandelions, and each of the travellers made his own.

The townsfolk saw the balloon dangling motionless from the hazel bush, and they said to one another:

"It will keep on hanging there until it bursts. Nobody will go anywhere in that balloon."

"Why don't you set out?" they shouted over the fence. "Hurry up, before it bursts!"

"Don't worry," said Doono. "We are setting out tomorrow, at eight o'clock in the morning."

Most of them laughed, but there were a few who thought the balloon might rise after all.

"What if it really should?" they said. "We must be sure to come here in the morning and see."

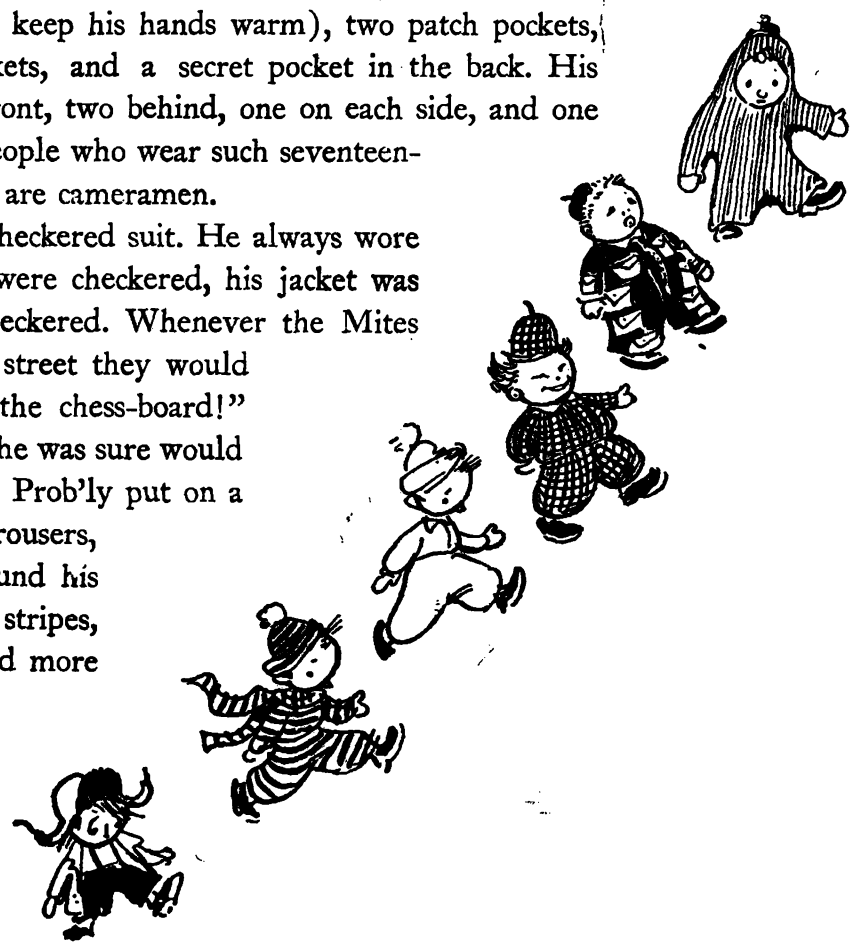
Chapter Seven

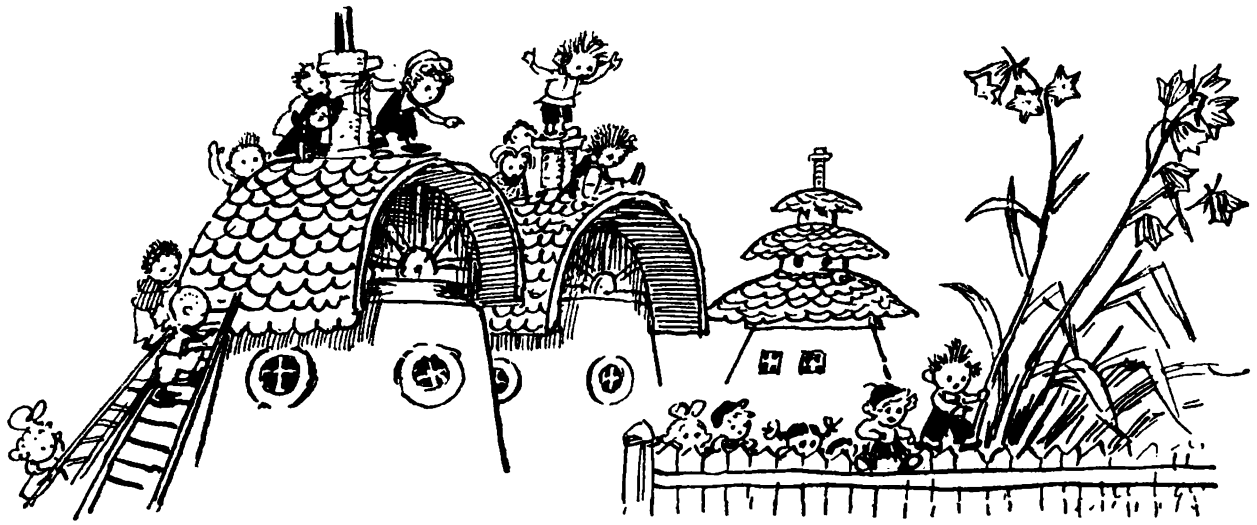
PREPARATIONS FOR THE ASCENT

The next morning Doono woke his friends up earlier than usual. They got up and began dressing for the flight. Bendum and Twistum put on their leather jackets. Shot put on his favourite hip boots that buckled above the knee—very good boots for a long journey. Swifty put on his "lightening" suit, which deserves a word of explanation. Since Swifty was always in a great hurry and could not bear to waste time, he designed a suit for himself without any buttons on it. Everyone knows that nothing takes so much time as buttoning and unbuttoning. Swifty's suit did not have a separate shirt and trousers, it was all in one, like overalls, and it fastened with a single snap on the top of his head. When he unsnapped it, the suit slipped off his shoulders and fell at his feet in the twinkling of an eye.

Roly-Poly put on his best suit. The thing he loved above all else was pockets. The more pockets there were in a suit, the better he liked it. The jacket of his best suit had ten pockets in it: two breast pockets, two slit pockets (one on either side to keep his hands warm), two patch pockets, below these, three inside pockets, and a secret pocket in the back. His trousers had two pockets in front, two behind, one on each side, and one on his right knee. The only people who wear such seventeen-pocketed suits in ordinary life are cameramen.

Treacly-Sweeter put on a checkered suit. He always wore checkered suits. His trousers were checkered, his jacket was checkered and his cap was checkered. Whenever the Mites spied him coming down the street they would shout: "Look! Here comes the chess-board!" P'raps put on a ski suit which he was sure would be comfortable for travelling. Prob'ly put on a striped jersey and striped trousers, and tied a striped scarf round his neck. In a word, he was all stripes, and from a distance he looked more





like a mattress than a Mite. They all dressed up in the best they had—all, that is, but Scatterbrain, who had the habit of throwing his things just anywhere and so could not find his jacket on this memorable morning. He couldn't find his cap either, but at the last moment he found his winter cap with ear-flaps on it under the bed.

Blobs, the artist, resolved to draw everything he saw during the flight. Long before it was time to set out he had put his paints and brushes in the basket of the balloon. Trills took his flute with him. Dr. Pillman put his medicine bag under one of the benches in the basket. That, of course, was a very sensible thing to do, for someone was sure to fall ill on such an unusual trip.

Before the clock had struck six, almost all the townsfolk had gathered round the house. Many of them had climbed up on to the fence or the roofs of the houses.

Swifty, who was the first to get into the basket, chose the most comfortable seat for himself. Dunno got in next.

"Look!" cried the onlookers, "they're taking their seats!"

"What do you mean by this?" said Doono. "It's much too soon! Get out!"

"Why?" said Dunno. "Why shouldn't we take off?"

"Why!" scoffed Doono. "Because we have to fill the balloon with hot air first."

"Why?" asked Swifty again.

"Because hot air is lighter than cold, and so it rises. As soon as we fill the balloon with hot air it will rise and take the basket with it," explained Doono.

"So we still have to pump hot air into it!" said Dunno in a disappointed voice as he and Swifty climbed out of the basket.

"Look!" cried someone from the roof of a neighbouring house. "They're getting out. They've decided not to go after all!"

"Naturally," came a voice from another roof. "As if anyone could sail up into the air in a balloon like that! They're just trying to fool us!"

While this was going on, Doono told his friends to fill some sacks with sand and put them in the basket. Swifty, Mums, and P'raps did it.

"What are they doing?" asked the perplexed onlookers. "Why should they put sacks of sand into the basket?"

"Hey, what do you need those sacks for?" called out Sinker, who was sitting astride the fence.

"To throw down on your heads when we're up in the air!" called back Dunno.

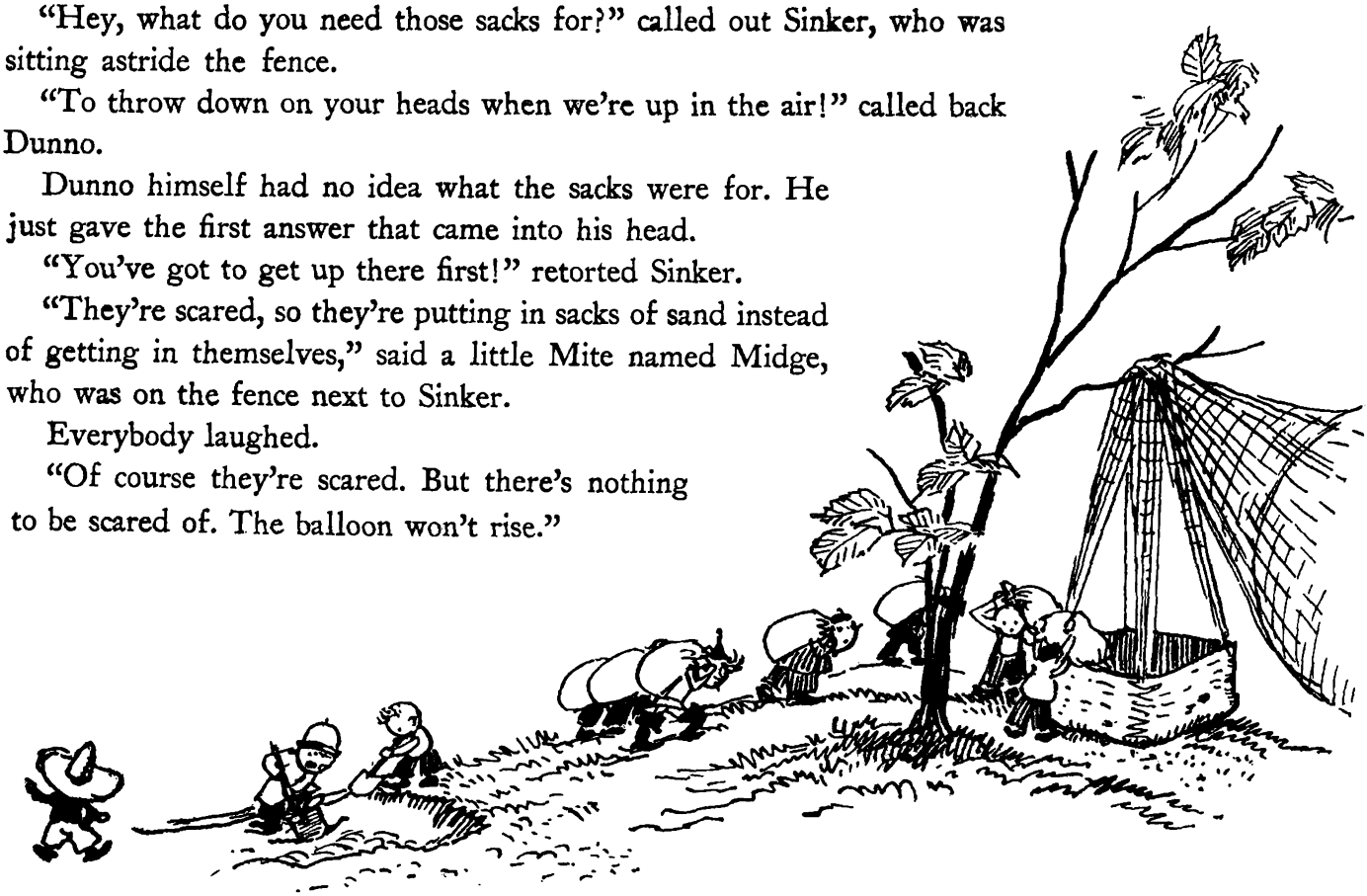
Dunno himself had no idea what the sacks were for. He just gave the first answer that came into his head.

"You've got to get up there first!" retorted Sinker.

"They're scared, so they're putting in sacks of sand instead of getting in themselves," said a little Mite named Midge, who was on the fence next to Sinker.

Everybody laughed.

"Of course they're scared. But there's nothing to be scared of. The balloon won't rise."



"What if it does?" said a little girl-Mite who was peeking through a chink in the fence.

While they were arguing as to whether the balloon would rise or not, Doono had his friends build a big bonfire in the middle of the yard, and the onlookers saw Bendum and Twistum carry a great copper boiler out of their shop and hang it over the fire. Bendum and Twistum had made this boiler to heat air in it. It had a lid with a hole in it that fastened down tightly, and it also had a hole in the side. A pipe was connected to this hole in the side, and at the other end of the pipe was a pump for pumping air into the boiler. When the air became hot it escaped through the hole in the lid.

None of the onlookers knew what the boiler was for but each had his own guess.

"They must be going to make porridge, so that they can have a good breakfast before setting out," said a girl-Mite named Daisy.

"I should think so!" said Midge. "You'd want a good breakfast, too, if you were setting out on such a long journey!"

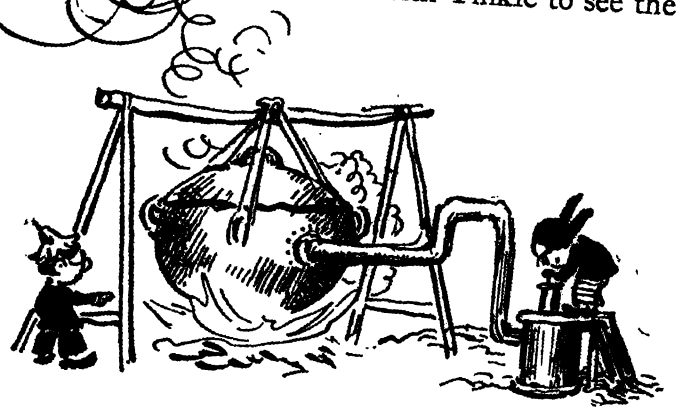
"True, it may be their last—" sighed Daisy.

"Last what?"

"Meal. They'll go up in the air, the balloon will burst, and that will be the end of them."

"Don't worry, it won't burst," said Sinker. "It'd have to rise first, but it's been lying here on the ground for over a week and nobody's gone up in it yet."

"But they're just about to," said Pee-Wee, who had come with Tinkle to see the ascent.



This started a heated argument. If one person said the balloon would rise, another said it wouldn't, and if one person said it wouldn't, another said it would. There was such a yelling and screeching that no other sound could be heard. On one of the roofs two little boy-Mites got so

angry that they began to fight and had to be separated by throwing cold water over them.

By that time the air in the boiler was hot, and Doono said it was time to fill the balloon with it. But before the balloon could be filled with hot air, it had to be emptied of cold air. Doono untied the string and the cold air began to escape with a loud hiss. The onlookers had been too busy arguing to watch what was happening, but now they turned round and saw the balloon growing smaller and smaller. It became as limp and puckered as a dried apple and settled on the bottom of the basket. In the place where there had just been a fine big balloon, there was now nothing but a birch-bark basket with a net over it.

As soon as the hissing stopped there was an outburst of laughter. Everybody laughed—those who had said the balloon would rise as well as those who had said it would not. Dunno's friend Gunky laughed so hard that he fell off the roof and bumped his head. Dr. Pillman had to run for his medicine bag and paint the pump with iodine.

"So that's how it goes up in the air!" the onlookers cried. "A fine balloon Doono thought of! Spent a whole week making it and it burst in a second! What a joke! Oh dear! How very funny!"

But Doono paid no attention to them. He ran a pipe from the boiler to the balloon and told his friends to start pumping. Fresh air was pumped into the boiler and hot air found its way into the balloon; the balloon began to swell and rise out of the basket.

"Look!" cried the onlookers. "It's swelling again! Are they crazy? Do they want it to burst a second time?"

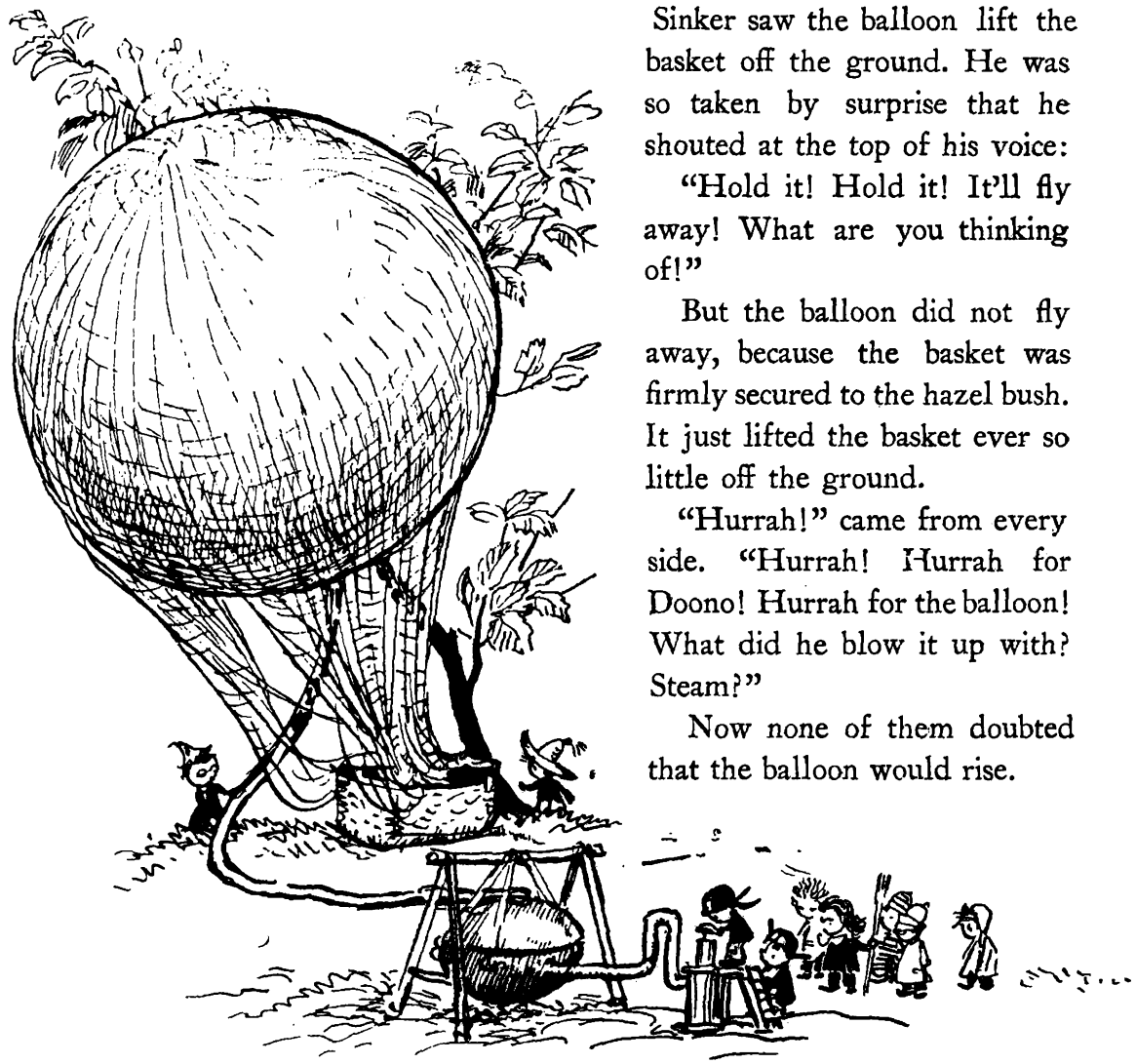
Nobody believed that the balloon would rise. But it kept getting bigger and bigger, until at last it lay on top of the basket like an enormous melon. Suddenly everybody saw it rise slowly and draw the net tight. The townsfolk gasped with surprise. They could see for themselves that this time nobody was pulling the balloon up with ropes.

"Hurrah!" cried Daisy, clapping her hands.

"Stop shouting!" growled Sinker.

"But look, it's rising!"

"It hasn't risen yet. It's tied to the basket, and it'll never pull up the basket with all those Mites in it."



But at that very moment Sinker saw the balloon lift the basket off the ground. He was so taken by surprise that he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Hold it! Hold it! It'll fly away! What are you thinking of!"

But the balloon did not fly away, because the basket was firmly secured to the hazel bush. It just lifted the basket ever so little off the ground.

"Hurrah!" came from every side. "Hurrah! Hurrah for Doono! Hurrah for the balloon! What did he blow it up with? Steam?"

Now none of them doubted that the balloon would rise.

Chapter Eight

UP IN THE AIR IN A BALLOON

At last the balloon was filled to bursting with hot air. Doono had the boiler taken away and he himself tied the end of the balloon with a strong cord so that the hot air could not escape. Then he ordered his friends to get into the basket. The first to climb in was Swifty, and the next was Roly-Poly, who almost fell down on the heads of the others. Besides being very fat, he had stuffed his pockets with sugar and biscuits and all sorts of things. And then he had put on galoshes and was carrying an umbrella in case of rain. If his friends had not helped him, he would never have got into the basket. When Roly-Poly was safely in, the other Mites scrambled up the ladder. Treacly-Sweeter kept bustling about, seeing that everything went smoothly.

"Get in, get in," he kept saying. "Make yourselves comfortable. There's room for everybody in our balloon."

"You get in too," they said to him.

"Plenty of time," he replied. "First I must see that all of you are settled."

He held their hands as they climbed up the ladder and gave them a little push from behind.

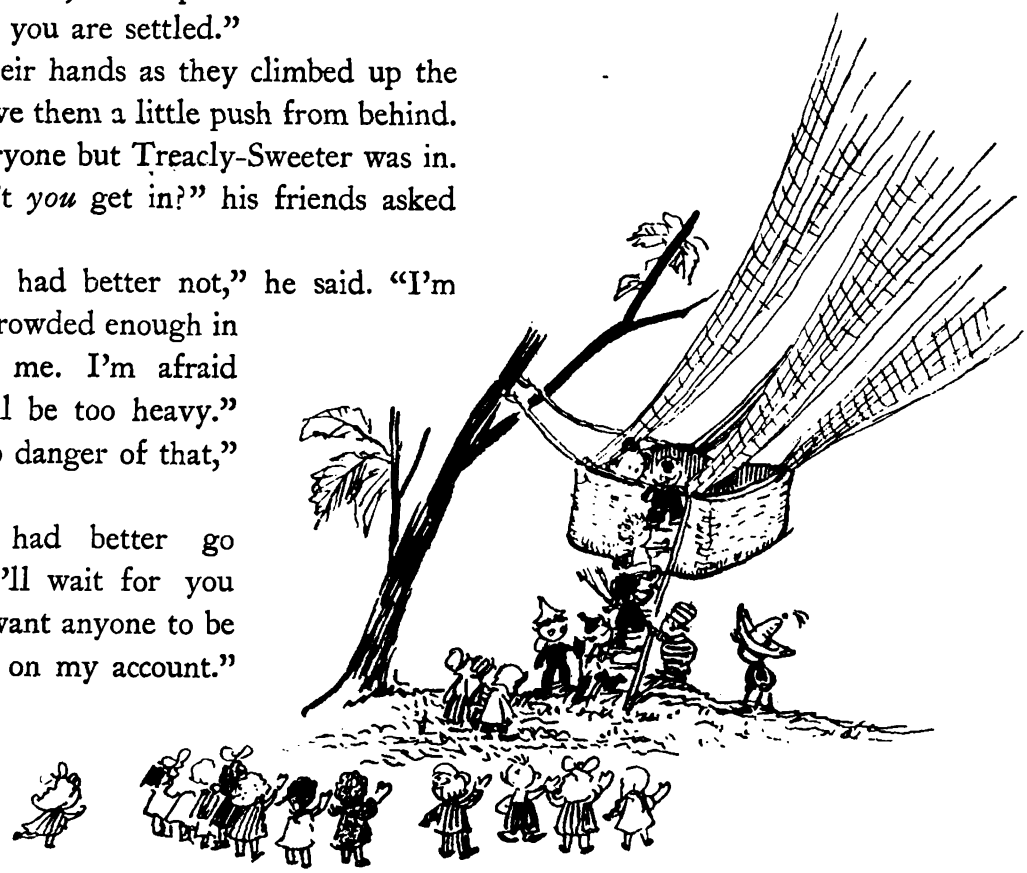
At last everyone but Treacly-Sweeter was in.

"Why don't *you* get in?" his friends asked him.

"Perhaps I had better not," he said. "I'm very fat. It's crowded enough in there without me. I'm afraid the basket will be too heavy."

"There's no danger of that," they said.

"No, you had better go without me. I'll wait for you here. I don't want anyone to be uncomfortable on my account."



"But nobody will be," said Doono. "Get in. Once we decided to go together, together we go."

Treacly-Sweeter climbed in very reluctantly, and then an unexpected thing happened: the basket and the balloon settled to the ground.

"So that's how they fly!" laughed Midge from where he was sitting on the fence.

"What are you laughing at?" said Sinker roughly. "It's not polite to laugh at accidents."

"This is no accident," said Glass-Eye. "It's just that the balloon was made to lift fifteen people and it cannot lift sixteen."

"In other words, it won't rise into the air?" said Sinker.

"They'll have to put somebody out first," said Glass-Eye.

"They'll probably put out Dunno," said Tinkle.

Treacly-Sweeter was very glad this had happened, because he was secretly afraid to go up in the balloon.

"I told you it would be too heavy!" he said. "Here, I'll get out."

He already had one leg over the side when Doono threw one of the sacks of sand overboard. The balloon instantly began to rise. In this way everybody discovered why Doono had put the sacks of sand in the basket. There was a burst of applause, but Doono silenced it by raising his hand. Then he made a speech.

"Good-bye, friends!" he said. "We are going on a long journey. We'll be back in a week. Good-bye until we meet again!"

"Good-bye! Good-bye! Happy journey!" cried the townsfolk, waving their hands and their caps.

Doono took a penknife out of his pocket and cut the rope that held the balloon to the hazel bush. Slowly the balloon began to rise. For a

second it was held by a branch of the bush, but presently it broke loose and gained speed as it rose into the air.

"Hurrah!" cried the onlookers. "Hurrah for Doono and his friends! Hurrah!"

People clapped and threw their caps into the air. The girl-Mites hugged each other in their excitement. Pee-Wee and Tinkle even kissed each other, and Margy wept.

Meanwhile the balloon rose higher and higher and the wind carried it away. Soon it became nothing but a little speck that could hardly be seen against the background of the blue sky. Glass-Eye climbed up on to a roof and trained his telescope on it. Posey, the poet, stood next to him on the very edge of the roof. He seemed to be deep in thought as he stood there with his arms folded, gazing at the excited crowd. Suddenly he threw out his arms and cried in a loud voice:

"A poem! Listen to my poem!"

Instantly there was silence. All heads were turned to Posey.

"A poem!" whispered the Mites to each other. "We're going to hear a poem."

Posey waited until the last whisper had died down, then he held out one arm in the direction of the vanishing balloon, cleared his throat, and said once more:

"A poem."

After a little pause he began to recite the lines he had just made up:

Our brother-Mites have sailed away
In their balloon this gala day.
They have no wings, but on my word,
They fly as well as any bird!
That comes of having brains, tra-la!
That comes of taking pains, hurrah!

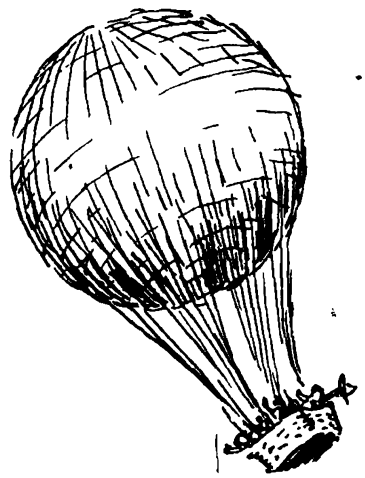
What a lot of shouting and hand-clapping was there! The boy-Mites pulled Posey down off the roof and carried him home on their shoulders, and the girl-Mites pulled petals off flowers and strewed the way with them. They made as much of Posey as if it was he who had made the balloon and sailed away in it. The Mites learned his poem by heart and sang it in the streets.

Wherever you went that evening you could hear people singing:

That comes of having brains, tra-la!
That comes of taking pains, hurrah!

Chapter Nine

UP IN THE CLOUDS



So smoothly did the balloon rise into the air that our brave explorers were quite unaware of it. Only a minute later when they glanced over the side, did they see the crowd of Mites far down below waving their hands and throwing their caps into the air. And they caught faint sounds of "Hurrah!"

"Good-bye!" called Doono and his friends in reply.

They, too, began to wave their caps. Scatterbrain lifted his hand to take off his cap only to discover that he was without one.

"Stop the balloon!" he cried out. "I've forgotten my cap."

"You're always forgetting something," grumbled Grumps.

"The balloon can't be stopped now," said Doono. "It will keep on going until the air cools off, and then it will settle to the earth."

"What am I supposed to do, go without a cap?" said Scatterbrain in an offended tone.

"But I thought you found your cap under the bed?" said Roly-Poly.

"So I did," said Scatterbrain, "but I was hot and took it off and put it on the table and forgot to take it at the last moment."

"You're always forgetting something at the last moment," grumbled Grumps.

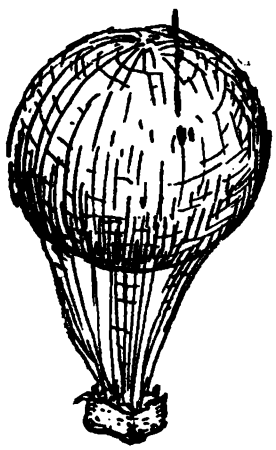
"Look, we've left our house behind!" cried Dunno all of a sudden.

Everybody laughed, and Grumps said:

"Did you think we could take it with us?"

"No, I didn't," said Dunno sullenly. "I just noticed it down there and thought how funny it was that we used to live in a house and now here we are sailing away in a balloon."

"What of it?" grumbled Grumps. "You don't know where this sailing will take us yet."



"You're always grumbling, Grumps," said Dunno. "You spoil everybody's fun even in a balloon."

"If you don't like it, get out and walk," said Grumps.

"How can I get out and walk?" said Dunno.

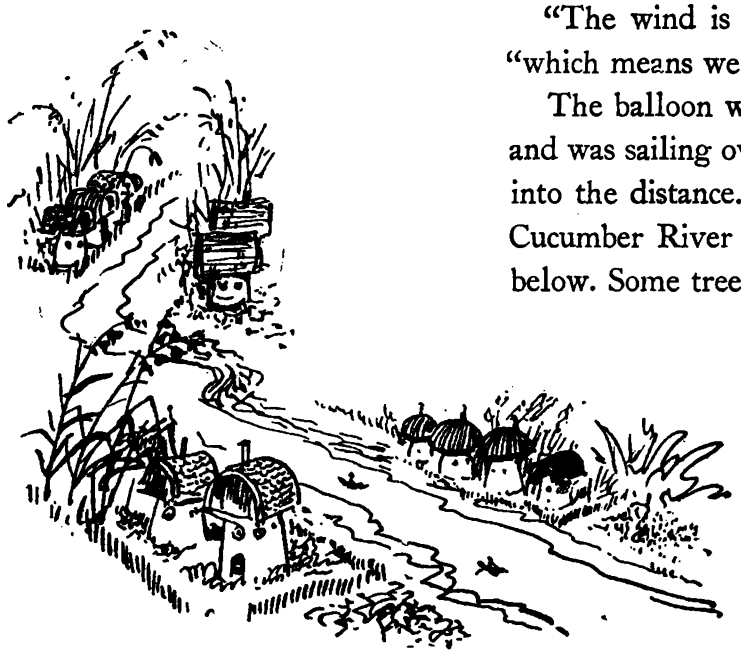
"Oh, stop it!" said Doono. "A balloon is no place to quarrel in."

By this time the balloon had risen so high that the whole of Flower Town could be seen at a glance. The houses were mere specks, and the Mites could not be seen at all. The wind kept driving the balloon before it, and soon the town lay far behind them.

Doono took a compass out of his pocket to find out the direction in which the balloon was sailing.

A compass is a little metal box with a magnetic needle inside. The needle always points to the North, and so if you watch it you can always tell where you are going and how to go back. That is why Doono had taken the compass with him.

"The wind is taking us due north," said Doono, "which means we must go back southwards."



The balloon was very high in the air by this time and was sailing over some fields. The town had faded into the distance. The brook which the Mites called Cucumber River wound like a tiny ribbon far down below. Some trees here and there in the fields looked like fluffy bushes.

Suddenly Roly-Poly noticed a little dark spot down below. It was moving quickly over the ground, as if it were running after the balloon.

"Look! Somebody's running after us!" cried Roly-Poly.

They all stared down at the dark spot.

"It leaped straight over the river," cried Scatterbrain.

"What could it be?" asked Swifty. "Now it's leaping over the trees!"

At that moment the balloon was sailing over a wood. The spot could be seen sliding over the tops of the trees. Dr. Pillman put on his spectacles, but even so he could not make out what the spot was.

"I know!" called out Dunno all of a sudden. "I'm the first to find out! It's Dot. We forgot to take Dot with us and he's running after us!"

"He is not," said Shot. "Dot is sitting under the bench at my feet."

"Then what could it be? Can you tell us, Doono?"

Doono put away his compass and looked down.

"Why, it's our shadow!" he said with a laugh.

"What? Our shadow?" asked everybody in surprise.

"Yes. Our balloon casts a shadow which follows us over the ground."

The Mites kept their eyes fixed on the shadow, which grew smaller and smaller until at last it disappeared altogether.

"What has happened to it?" they asked in alarm.

"We're too high up in the air to see our shadow," explained Doono.

"It's the limit," grumbled Grumps. "Here we are packed away in a basket where we can't even see our own shadow!"

"Grumbling again!" said Dunno. "You don't give anybody any peace!"

"Peace!" scoffed Grumps. "If it's peace you want, you'd better sit at home and not go sailing away in a balloon!"

"Sit at home yourself."

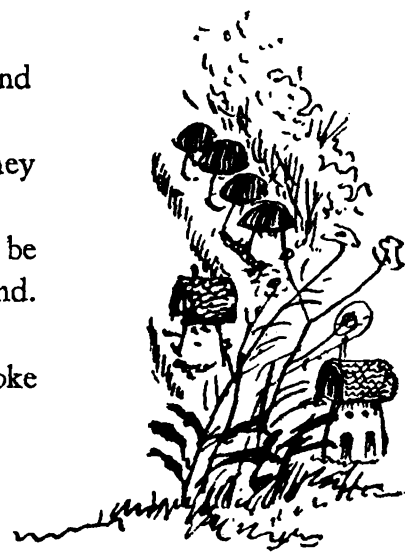
"It's not *me* who wants peace."

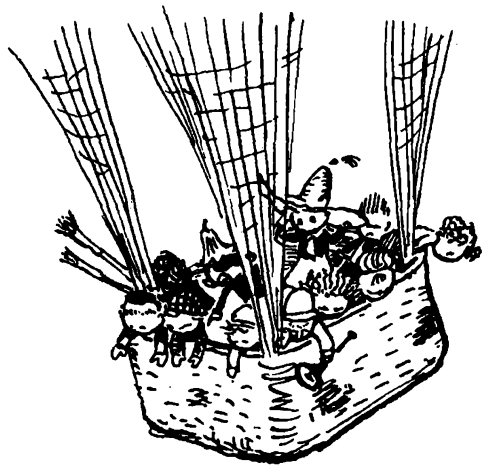
"There you go again!" said Doono. "I'll have to land and put both of you out."

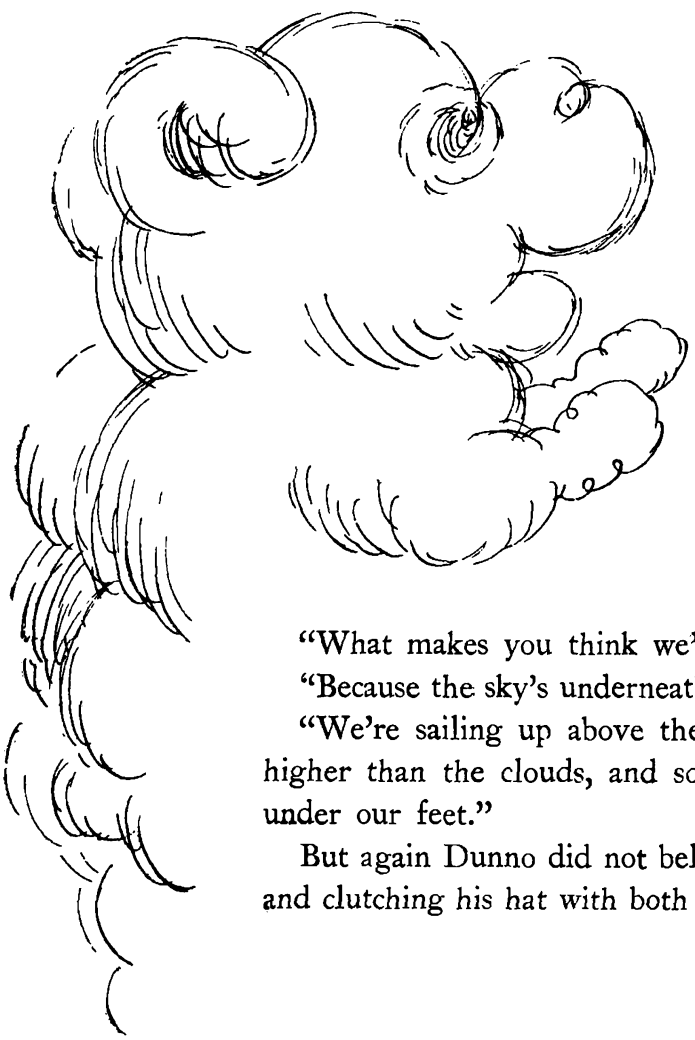
This made Grumps and Dunno so frightened that they stopped quarrelling.

Just then the balloon sailed into what seemed to be smoke or fog. They could no longer see the ground. They seemed to be hung round with white curtains.

"What is it?" they all cried. "Where does that smoke come from?"







"It's not smoke," said Doono, "it's clouds. We've reached the clouds, and now we're in them."

"You're just making that up," said Dunno. "Clouds are all white and fluffy, like meringue, but this is like fog."

"What do you think clouds are made of?" asked Doono. "They're made of fog. They just look solid from a distance."

Dunno did not believe him.

"Don't listen to him," he said to the others. "He's trying to make us think he knows a lot, but he really doesn't know anything. Trying to make us think clouds are made of fog! They're made of meringue! As if I had never tasted meringue!"

The balloon kept rising higher and higher, and soon it came out of the clouds and sailed above them. Dunno looked down and saw them. They stretched out on all sides, cutting off a view of the earth.

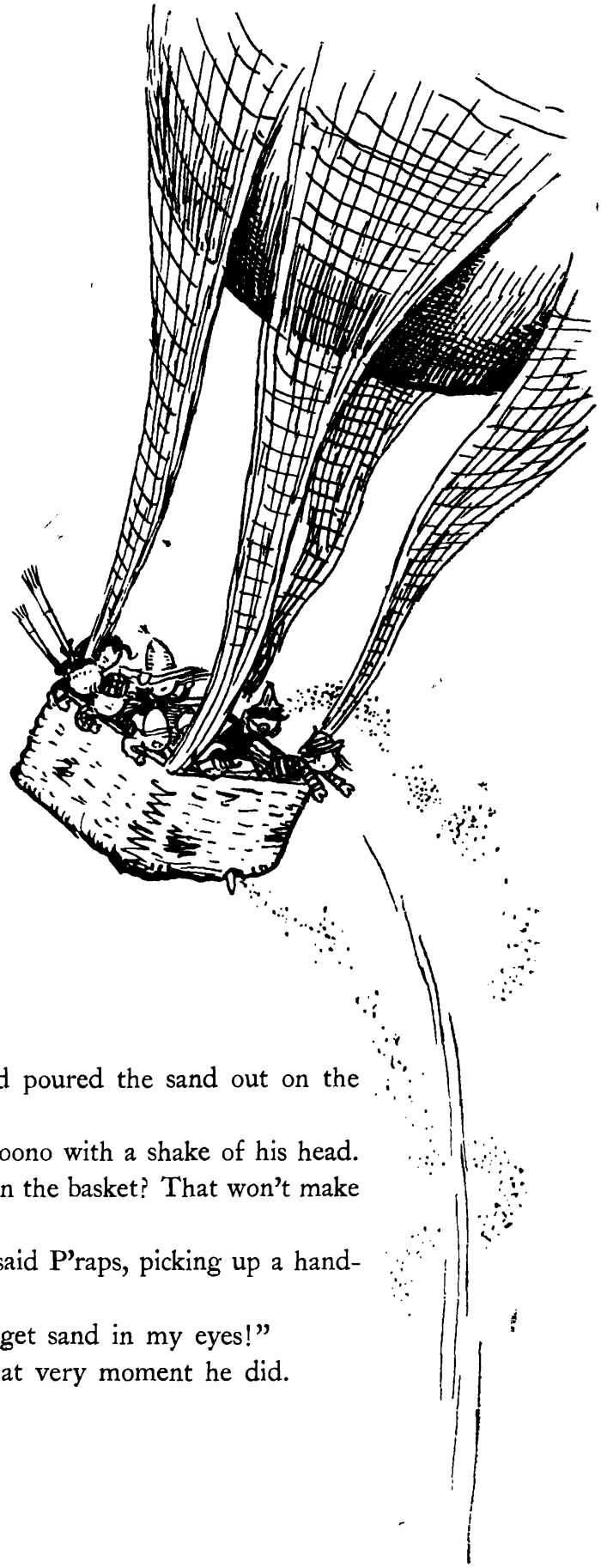
"Goodness!" exclaimed Dunno. "The sky's underneath us! We're sailing upside down!"

"What makes you think we're upside down?" asked everybody.

"Because the sky's underneath, as we all can see."

"We're sailing up above the clouds," said Doono. "We've climbed higher than the clouds, and so they are no longer over our heads but under our feet."

But again Dunno did not believe him. He sat there holding his breath and clutching his hat with both hands for fear it might fall off.



The wind carried them swiftly above the clouds, but soon all the Mites noticed that the balloon was going down.

"Why is that?" they asked in alarm.

"The air in the balloon is cooling off," said Doono.

"And will we soon reach the ground?" asked Swifty.

"What do you think the sacks of sand are for?" said Doono. "If we throw out the sand the balloon will rise again."

P'raps seized a sack and threw it out.

"What are you doing?" cried Doono. "You mustn't throw out a whole sack! It might hit somebody on the head!"

"P'raps it won't," said P'raps.

"P'raps it won't!" jeered Doono. "You've got to untie the sacks and throw the sand out a little at a time."

"I'll do it," volunteered Prob'ly.

He untied another one of the sacks and poured the sand out on the floor of the basket.

"You're as bad as your brother," said Doono with a shake of his head. "What good can come of pouring the sand in the basket? That won't make the basket any lighter."

"P'raps I'd better throw it overboard," said P'raps, picking up a handful and tossing it out.

"Look out!" said Scatterbrain. "You'll get sand in my eyes!"

"P'raps I won't," said P'raps, but at that very moment he did.

Everybody began to scold him, and while they were doing this Prob'ly took out a knife and made a hole in the bottom of the basket for the sand to pour through.

"Stop! What are you doing?" cried Doono when he saw him. "The basket will go to pieces and we'll all pour through!"

"It prob'ly won't," replied Prob'ly.

"They're the only two words you and your brother know—'p'raps' and 'prob'ly'," said Doono, and he took the knife away from him.

As the sand poured through the hole in the basket, the balloon became lighter and climbed into the sky again. The Mites looked about them with satisfaction. They were glad to see the balloon climbing. The only one who was dissatisfied was Grumps, and he always found something to grumble about.

"Up and down, up and down," he said. "Is that the way for a respectable balloon to behave?"

Unable to think of anything else to say, he looked at Roly-Poly, who was munching a lump of sugar.

"What's that you're gnawing at?" he asked.

"A lump of sugar. Took it out of my pocket and began gnawing."

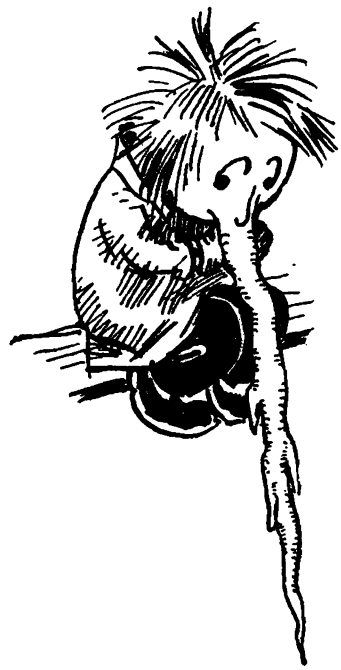
"A fine time to gnaw sugar! Can't you wait until you get down on the ground?"

"Why should I carry extra weight around with me?" said Roly-Poly. "If I eat the sugar, the balloon will become lighter and rise higher."

"You'll gnaw yourself into a jelly," grumbled Grumps.

Chapter Ten

AN ACCIDENT



Some people think that the higher you go, the warmer it is. That is not true. The higher you go, the colder it is, because the sun heats the earth with its rays. The earth becomes like a stove, and everybody knows that the closer you are to a stove, the warmer it is.

The Mites discovered this for themselves when they flew off the earth in their balloon. It was so very cold up above the clouds that their cheeks and noses turned red and they had to stamp their feet and wave their arms to keep warm. Scatterbrain was the coldest of all because he had left his cap behind. He shivered all over, his teeth chattered, and a great big icicle formed at the end of his nose.

"Stop chattering," grumbled Grumps. "It's cold enough without having to listen to your teeth chattering!"

"It's not my fault if it's c-o-l-d!" shivered Scatterbrain.

"I can't bear to hear teeth chattering," said Grumps, getting up. "It gives me a chill."

He sat down next to Blobs, but Blobs' teeth were chattering, too. Grumps looked at him suspiciously.

"You doing it too?" he said. "Just to spite me, eh?"

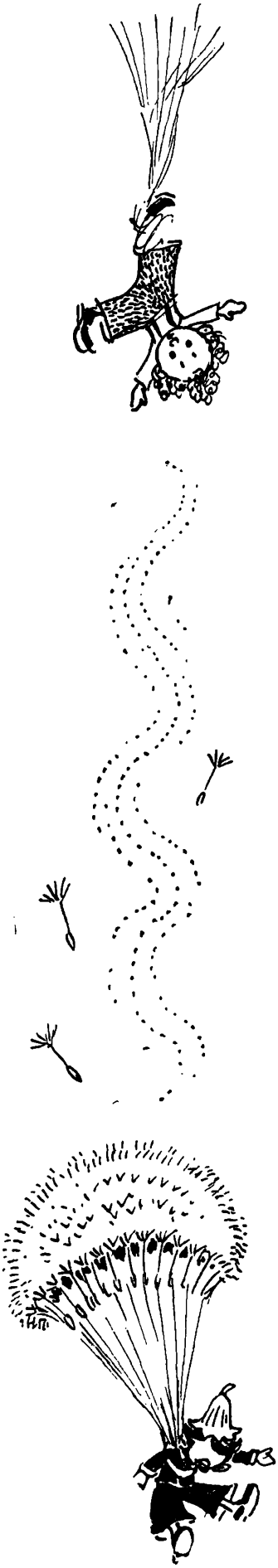
"Not at all. Because it's so c-o-l-d."

Grumps got up and took another seat. He kept changing his seat all the time, and everybody found him a nuisance.

The balloon was covered with hoar-frost and shone like silver in the sunlight.

Gradually the air inside the rubber cooled and the balloon began to go down. In a minute it was falling swiftly through the air. There were no more sacks of sand and nothing could be done to stop the fall.

"H-e-l-p!" cried Treacly-Sweeter.



"We're done for!" wailed Dunno, and dived under a bench.

"Get out of there!" Doono shouted at him.

"Why should I?"

"We're going to jump with parachutes."

"I'd rather stay here," said Dunno from under the bench.

Doono seized him by the scruff of the neck and dragged him out.

"Don't touch me!" cried Dunno. "I'll file a complaint!"

"Stop shouting," said Doono calmly. "No hysterics, if you please. Watch me jump, and then follow suit."

His calm voice made Dunno feel the least bit better. Doono went to the edge of the basket.

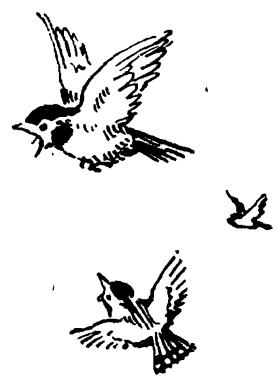
"Attention, everybody!" he said. "You are all to jump after me, one by one. Anyone who stays behind will be carried up in the air by the balloon. Get your parachutes ready. And now—jump!"

Doono jumped and went sailing down. Swifty jumped next, but he did not go sailing down. Instead of jumping and then opening his parachute, he opened his parachute and then jumped. The parachute caught on to the side of the basket, Swifty got his foot entangled in the ropes and hung upside-down in the air. He kicked and wriggled like a worm on a fish-hook, but the parachute would not come free.

"Goodness me, if the parachute comes free, Swifty will land on his head!" exclaimed Dr. Pillman.

Quickly the Mites seized the ropes of the parachute and pulled Swifty back into the basket.

Dunno noticed that the balloon was rising again.



"Look! Nobody else need jump!" he said. "The balloon has stopped falling!"

"Why is that?" asked P'raps in surprise.

"Because Doono jumped out and the balloon's lighter, can't you understand that, stupid?" said Grumps.

"What will Doono do without us?" said Roly-Poly.

P'raps gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"P'raps just walk home," he said.

"And what will we do without Doono?"

"Pooh! As if we couldn't get on without Doono!" said Dunno.

"We've got to have somebody tell us what to do," said Roly-Poly.

"I'll tell you what to do from now on," announced Dunno. "I'll be in charge from now on."

"You!" said Grumps in surprise. "A fellow with a head like yours?"

"What's wrong with my head?" said Dunno. "You can jump out and join Doono if you don't like my head."

Grumps glanced over the edge.

"How would I find him?" he said. "We've sailed a long way since then. We ought to have jumped when he did."

"Jump now. Go ahead and jump."

Grumps and Dunno began to quarrel, and since there was no Doono to stop them, the quarrel went on and on until evening. The sun went down. The wind rose. The air inside the rubber got colder and colder and the balloon began to go down again, but Grumps and Dunno went on quarrelling.

"Enough of this," said Treacly-Sweeter to Dunno. "If you're in charge, tell us what to do. The balloon's falling again."

"I will in just a minute," said Dunno.

He sat down on a bench, put one finger to his forehead, and began to think. Meanwhile the balloon went down faster than ever.

"What's there to think about?" said Bendum. "If we had some more sacks of sand we could throw them out."

"Quite right," said Dunno, snatching at the idea. "But since we have no more sacks of sand we'll have to throw one of you out. Then the balloon will go up in the air again."

"Who shall we throw?"

"I don't know," said Dunno, deep in thought. "Let's throw out the one who does the most grumbling."

"What if I don't want to be thrown out?" said Grumps. "There's no rule that says the one who does the most grumbling ought to be thrown out. Let's throw out the one who weighs the most."

"That's an idea," said Dunno, "we'll throw out Roly-Poly. He's the fattest."

"Quite right," said Treacly-Sweeter.

"What?" cried Roly-Poly. "Me the fattest? Treacly-Sweeter's fatter than me!"

"Me fatter than him?" cried Treacly-Sweeter, laughing and pointing a finger at Roly-Poly. "Take a look, everybody. Take a look. Ha, ha! Measure us, if you can't see who's fatter."

"Go ahead and measure us," said Roly-Poly, leaping over to Treacly-Sweeter like a fighting cock. Dunno took a piece of string out of his pocket and put it around Roly-Poly's waist. Then he put it around Treacly-Sweeter's waist, and it turned out that Treacly-Sweeter was fatter than Roly-Poly.

"I don't believe it!" cried Treacly-Sweeter. "Roly-Poly didn't play fair. He pulled in his stomach—I saw him!"

"I did not!" cried Roly-Poly.

"You did. I saw you. Let's measure all over again."

While Dunno was measuring Roly-Poly, Treacly-Sweeter kept dancing about him and saying:

"Come, come, none of that, now! Blow yourself up."

"Why should I blow myself up?" said Roly-Poly. "Of course I'll be fatter than you if I blow myself up."

"Very well, don't blow yourself up, but don't hold yourself in, either. You have no right to hold yourself in. Look what he's doing, everybody! It isn't fair! He's a cheat!"

When Dunno had taken Roly-Poly's exact measurement, he measured Treacly-Sweeter just as exactly, and this time it turned out that they were both the same size.

"We'll have to throw them both out," said Dunno with a sigh.

"But why, when one's enough?" asked Treacly-Sweeter.

Shot, the hunter, looked down and saw that the earth was coming up at them very fast.

"Hurry and decide before we crash, Dunno," he said.

"We'll have to count out who's to be thrown over," said P'raps.

"That's right," said Treacly-Sweeter, "but we've got to count everybody, fat and thin alike, so that nobody's feelings get hurt."

"All right," Dunno said, "I'll count."

They all stood in a circle, and Dunno began to count, poking his finger into each of them in turn:

Eny beny bess,
Tickle tackle tess,
Eny beny beany,
Tickle tackle teeny....

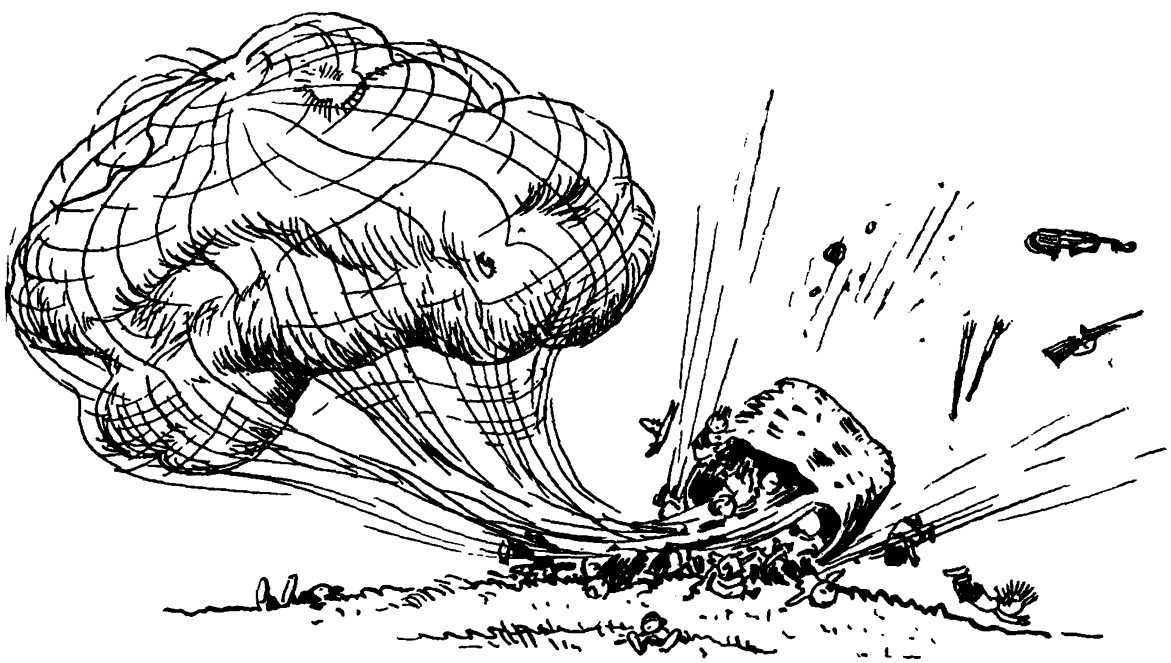
Then he said:

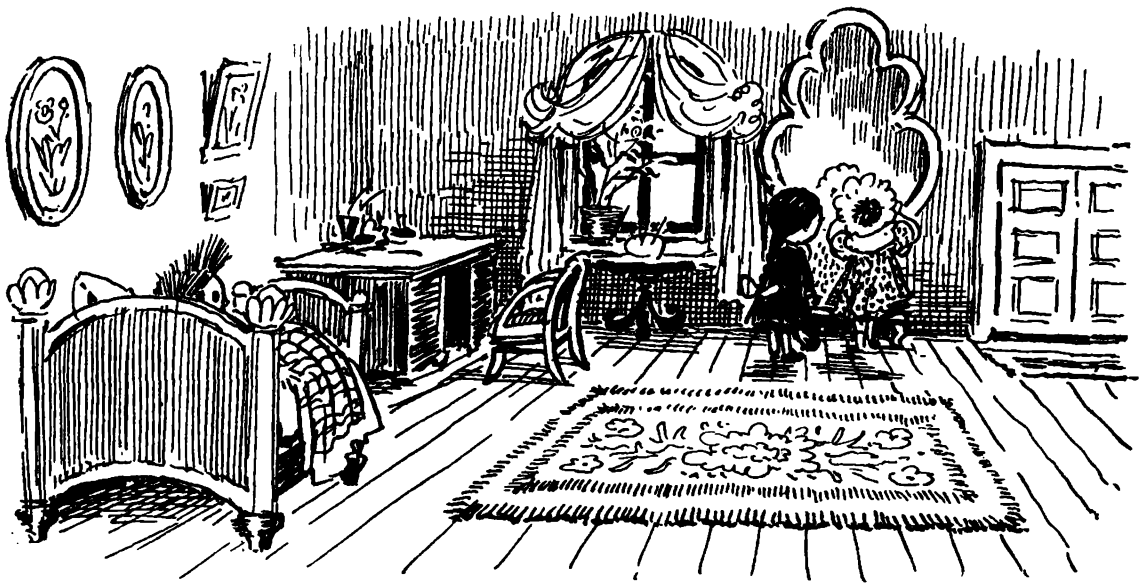
"I don't like that; here, I'll count all over again:

Ickity pickity rickity lee,
Able fable, make the tea,
Icky, picky, hot and sticky. . . ."

But at that moment the basket hit the ground and turned over. P'raps seized Prob'ly by the hand and they fell out together. All the other Mites rolled out like peas—all, that is, but Dunno, who clung to the edge of the basket, and Dot, who held on to Dunno's trousers with his teeth. When the balloon struck the ground it bounced back like a ball, lifting the basket with it, then it settled down slowly, dragging the basket over the ground behind it. Presently the balloon struck something hard and burst with a loud bang. Dot did a somersault in the air and ran away howling. Dunno fell out of the basket and lay motionless on the ground.

And that was the end of the balloon trip.





Chapter Eleven

IN A STRANGE PLACE

When Dunno woke up he found himself in a strange room. He was lying in a bed as soft as if the mattress were stuffed with dandelion fluff. He had been awakened by the sound of voices, and he looked round to see where they came from. The room had arm-chairs in the corners, and the walls were hung with rugs and pictures of flowers. At the window stood a one-legged table. A heap of coloured embroidery silks and a little cushion with pins and needles sticking out of it like porcupine quills lay on top of this table. Not far away was a writing-desk with a writing-set on it. Next to it was a book-case. On the far wall, near the door, was a big looking-glass. Two little girl-Mites were standing in front of the looking-glass and talking. One of them was wearing a blue silk dress with a silk sash tied in a bow behind. She had blue eyes and dark hair which

she wore in a long plait. The other girl-Mite had on a dress with pink and purple flowers in it, and she had curly flaxen hair that hung down to her shoulders. She was trying on a hat and chirping like a sparrow:

"What a horrid hat! It's ugly no matter how you put it on. I wanted to make myself a hat with a wide brim, but there wasn't enough stuff, so I had to make one with a narrow brim and that always makes one's face look round as a moon and that's so very unpleasant, don't you think?"

"You've been standing in front of this looking-glass quite long enough," said the blue-eyed girl. "I can't bear people who spend all their time in front of the looking-glass."

"What do you think a looking-glass is for?" went on the flaxen-haired one.

She put the hat on the very back of her head and screwed up her eyes to see how it looked.

Dunno found this very funny. He could not help laughing, and in stifling his laughter he let out a grunt. The flaxen-haired girl gave a little start and glanced at him suspiciously. But Dunno shut his eyes and pretended to be asleep. He heard the two girl-Mites come tiptoeing towards his bed and stop a little distance away.

"I thought I heard him say something," whispered one of them. "But I must have fancied it. When do you suppose he'll come to? He's been lying here unconscious since last evening."

"Honeysuckle said we weren't to wake him up," answered the other. "She told me to call her when he woke up himself."

"I wonder who Honeysuckle could be?" thought Dunno, but he gave no sign that he heard them.

"What a brave fellow!" came the voice again. "Just to think of his sailing up in the air in a balloon!"

Dunno had all he could do to keep his mouth from stretching from ear to ear in a delighted grin.

"I'll come back later, when he's awake," said one of them. "I want so badly to ask him about the balloon! What if he has concussion of the brain?"

Silly! thought Dunno. I haven't got anything of the sort!

The flaxen-haired girl-Mite said good-bye and went out. The room was very quiet after that. For a long time Dunno lay with his eyes closed, trying hard to catch the least sound. At last he opened one eye and saw the blue-eyed girl-Mite bending over him. She smiled, then frowned and shook her finger at him.

"Is that how you always wake up—one eye at a time?" she asked.

Dunno nodded his head and opened the other eye.

"So you weren't asleep?"

"Yes I was, I just woke up."

Dunno would have gone on talking if she hadn't laid her finger on his lip and said:

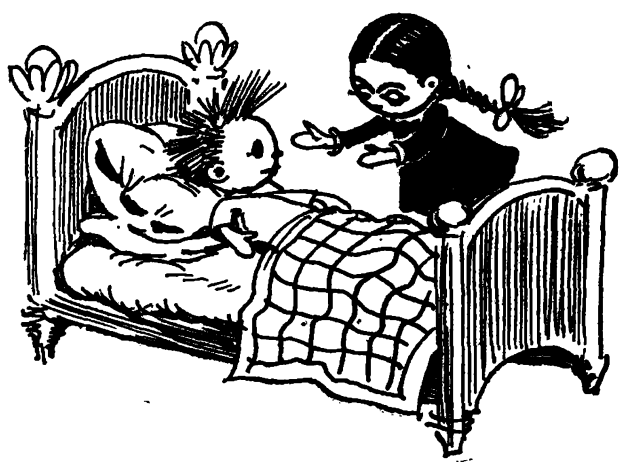
"Sh-sh. You mustn't talk. You're very ill."

"No, I'm not."

"How do you know? Are you a doctor?"

"No."

"Then you have no right to say such a thing. You must lie still until I call the doctor. What's your name?"



"Dunno. What's yours?"

"Cornflower."

"What a pretty name!" said Dunno.

"I'm glad you like it. You seem to be a very well-bred little boy."

Dunno smiled. It was pleasant to hear someone praise him. He was more used to being scolded than praised. As there were no boy-Mites in the room, he could speak to her politely without running any risk of being teased for talking to a girl.

"What's that other one's name?" he asked.

"What other one?"

"The one you were talking to. The pretty one, with flaxen hair."

"Oh!" exclaimed Cornflower. "So you weren't asleep after all!"

"Yes, I was. I just opened my eyes for a second and then fell asleep again."

"Shame on you!" said Cornflower, shaking her head and frowning at him. "So you don't think I'm pretty?"

"Indeed I do!" said Dunno in fright. "You're pretty, too."

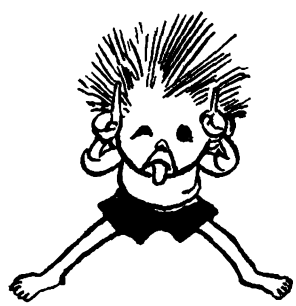
"Who's prettier?"

"You. And she. Both of you."

"You're a naughty little fibber, but I forgive you," said Cornflower. "Her name is Snowdrop. You'll see her again. But I mustn't talk to you any more, it's bad for you. Lie still and don't dare get out of bed. I'll go and call Honeysuckle."

"Who's Honeysuckle?"

"The doctor. She'll make you well."



And Cornflower went out. Dunno instantly jumped out of bed and began to search for his clothes. He meant to run away as fast as he could because he knew doctors were fond of giving their patients castor oil and smearing them with iodine. He could not find his clothes, but he found a doll sitting on a bench, propped up against the wall.

His first thought was to split the doll open

and find out what it was stuffed with—saw-dust or cotton-wool. He forgot all about his clothes and began to look for a knife, but just then he caught sight of himself in the looking-glass. He threw the doll on the floor and began making faces at himself in the looking-glass. When he had made quite a lot of faces, he said: "I'm rather good-looking; my face isn't so round."

Just then steps were heard outside the door. Dunno dived into bed and pulled the blanket up over him. Into the room came Cornflower and another girl-Mite in a white coat and cap and with a little brown bag in her hand. She had round red cheeks and grey eyes that looked at you from behind horn-rimmed spectacles. This, thought Dunno, must be the doctor.

Honeysuckle drew a chair over to Dunno's bed, put her bag on it, and said, with a shake of her head:

"Goodness me, what naughty little brats you boy-Mites are! Always getting into mischief! Now what in the world made you go up in that balloon? But come, not a word! I know what you'll say: 'I'll never do it again!' All boy-Mites say that, but the next minute they're up to something else."

Honeysuckle opened her bag, filling the room with the smell of iodine and other medicines. Dunno shuddered. Honeysuckle turned to him.

"Sit up, if you please," she said.

Dunno put one foot out of bed.

"Stay in bed, if you please!" she said crossly. "I told you to *sit* up."

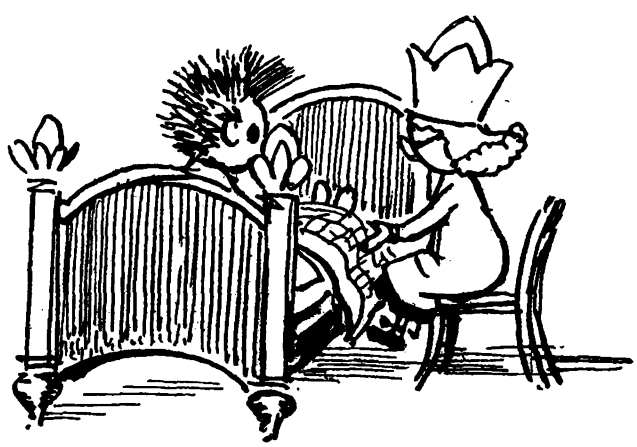
Dunno shrugged his shoulders and sat up.

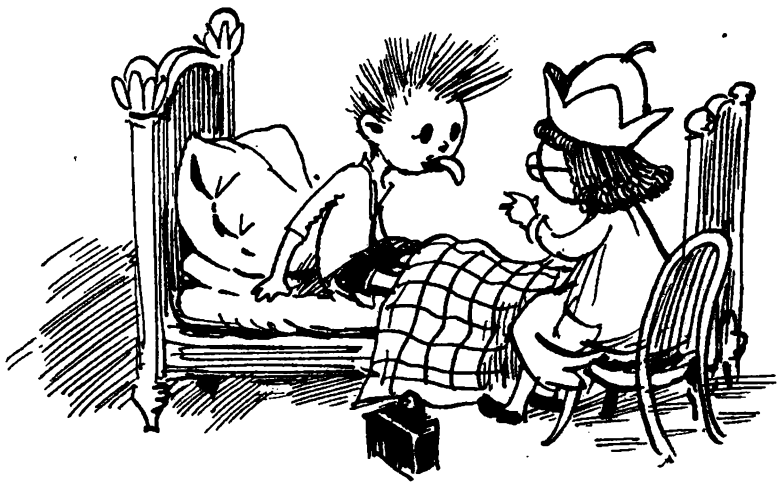
"Don't shrug your shoulders," said Honeysuckle. "Show me your tongue."

"What for?"

"No questions, if you please. Show me your tongue."

Dunno stuck out his tongue.





"Say 'a-a-a-h.'"

"A-a-ah," said Dunno.

Honeysuckle took a wooden trumpet out of her bag and listened to his heart and lungs.

"Breathe deeply, if you please."

Dunno began to breathe like a steam-engine.

"Stop breathing, if you please."

"Hee-hee!" tittered Dunno.

"What are you laughing at? I don't think I've said anything funny."

"How can I stop breathing?" he said, still laughing.

"You can't stop breathing altogether, but you can for a minute."

"So I can," said Dunno, and he stopped breathing.

When the examination was over, Honeysuckle went over to the desk and wrote out a prescription.

"The patient has a bruise on his shoulder," she said to Cornflower. "Go to the chemist's and buy a honey plaster. Cut off a piece and paste it on his shoulder. And don't let him get up. If he does, he'll break all your dishes and give somebody a punch in the head. One must be very strict with boy-Mites."

Honeysuckle put her trumpet away, glared at Dunno a moment, and went out.

Cornflower picked up the prescription.

"Did you hear what she said? You're not to get up," said Cornflower.

Dunno made a long face.

"No faces, now. And don't try to find your clothes, they're hidden safely away," said Cornflower, and went out of the room with the prescription in her hand.

Chapter Twelve

NEW FRIENDS

For a little while after Cornflower went out Dunno lay quietly in bed. But then he remembered the doll, and that he had intended to find out what it was stuffed with. He was just about to get up when he heard steps outside the door and some voices speaking in a whisper.

"Where is he?"

"In there."

"What's he doing?"

"Lying in bed."

"Dead?"

"I don't think so."

"Let me look."

"Don't!"

Dunno turned to the door and thought he saw somebody peeking through the key-hole.

"Let me, greedy! I want to look as badly as you do," came the whisper.

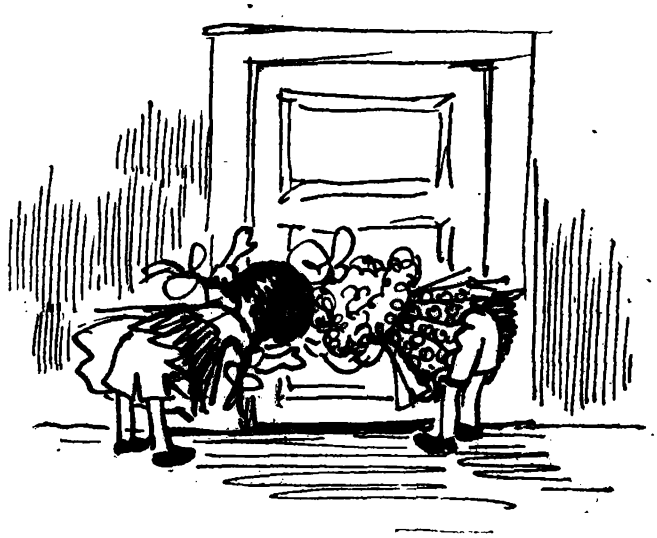
This was followed by the sounds of a tussle.

"I won't, you called me greedy."

"Don't push!" said somebody angrily. "If you push me once more I'll pull your hair!"

"And I'll pull yours and give you a kick besides!"

Dunno longed to see who it was. He jumped out of bed and flung open the door. He heard it strike something.



"Oh!" gasped two girl-Mites as they sprang apart, clutching their heads. One of them had a green rabbit embroidered on her pinafore, the other, a red squirrel. For a moment they stood staring

at Dunno in terror, then they blinked their eyes, burst into tears, and ran up a narrow wooden staircase to the right of the door.

"Boo-hoo!" wept one of them, who had two little pigtails sticking out on either side of her head.

"Boo-hoo!" wept the other, who wore a big blue bow on the very top of her head.

Dunno scratched behind his ear.

"A fine how-do-you-do!" he muttered. "I seem to have given them a good whack with the door."

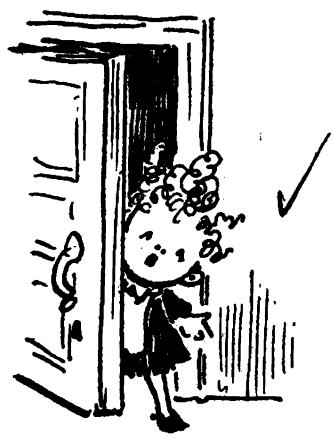
Afraid that he might do more mischief in this strange house, he climbed back into bed and pretended to be asleep. Presently the door opened and another girl-Mite looked in. She had curly hair, a pert little face with a pointed nose, and eyes that sparkled with mischief.

"Bully! Bully!" she shouted at him.

He was so taken aback that he sat straight up in bed. Instantly the door banged shut and he heard feet pattering swiftly away.

"The little stuck-up!" he growled scornfully.

He had just dropped his head back on the pillow and was about to doze off when the door burst open and there was the curly-head again.



"Bully!" she cried. "You big, big bully! Ha, ha, ha!"

Again the door banged shut. Dunno jumped out of bed and ran out into the hall, but there was not a soul in sight.

"Just wait! I'll show you!" he threatened.

Picking up a wooden ruler that lay on the desk, he hid behind the door. He did not have long to wait. Soon steps were heard coming down the hall. Dunno lifted the ruler. The door opened. Down came the ruler.

"Ouch!"

It was Cornflower.

"Why did you hit me with the ruler?" she wailed, clutching her head. "Now I'll have a bruise on my forehead!"

"Maybe not," said Dunno, twisting the ruler uneasily in his fingers.

"I will, I will! You don't know how tender my skin is! I'd have a bruise if you hit me with a feather!" she cried.

"We can put a piece of plaster on it," said Dunno with sudden inspiration. "You brought a plaster from the chemist's, didn't you?"

"Yes, but I brought it for you."

"It'll do for both of us," said Dunno.

He took the scissors and cut the plaster into four pieces.

"Hurry," said Cornflower. "Put it here—here!"

She bent down and pointed to the sore spot.

Dunno pasted it on, but then he pulled it off again because it was crooked.

"Oh, be careful!" cried Cornflower. "It hurts!"

"It's all right now," said Dunno when the plaster was straight.

Cornflower ran over to the looking-glass.

"All right, did you say? A fine thing if anyone sees me with this plaster on my forehead! Here, show me your shoulder. Where's your bruise?"

And Cornflower began to paste plaster on his shoulder.

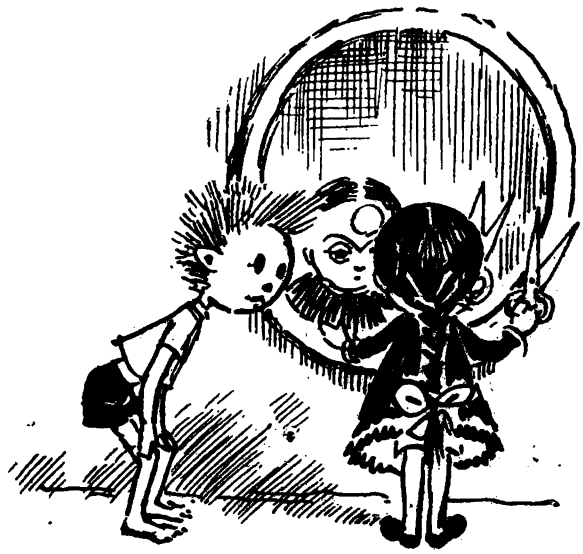
"It wasn't you I meant to hit," said Dunno.

"Who was it?"

Dunno wanted to tell her about the curly-head, but he was afraid that might be telling tales.

"Oh, nobody," he said. "I just wanted to see if that ruler was good for giving smacks."

"All you boy-Mites ever think about is giving smacks, but you don't



like to take them. What are you laughing at? Does this plaster look so funny on my forehead?" She went over to the looking-glass again.

"It really *does* look funny," she admitted.

"Cut it into a circle. Maybe it'll look better," advised Dunno.

She pulled it off, cut it into a circle, and pasted it back on.

"Is that better?" she said, turning to Dunno.

"Oh, yes, I think it even becomes you," he said.

Cornflower screwed up her eyes and studied herself in the glass.

"And now give me back my shirt and trousers," said Dunno.

"Not until you've washed," she said.

Cornflower took Dunno into the kitchen, where she showed him the sink, a shelf with soap and tooth-paste on it, and a towel hanging from a nail.

"Here's a tooth-brush and tooth-paste. Brush your teeth," and Cornflower held the brush out to him.

"I can't bear tooth-paste," muttered Dunno.

"Why not?"

"It tastes bad."

"You don't have to eat it."

"Even so, it burns your tongue."

"It doesn't last long."

He took the brush and ran it half-heartedly over his teeth once or twice, after which he spat and made a nasty face. Then he rinsed out his mouth and washed his hands with soap. When his hands were washed he put the soap back on the shelf and washed his face.

"Oh, no! You've got to wash your face with soap, too," said Cornflower.

"Rats!" said Dunno. "Do you think I want to get soap in my eyes?"

"Well, you won't get your clothes back till you've washed your face with soap!" said Cornflower finally.

There was no help for it. He lathered his face, but washed off the soap as quickly as possible.

"Br-r!" he shivered. "What cold water!"

After a splash or two he stretched out his arms without opening his eyes and felt the wall.

"What are you feeling for?" asked Cornflower, trying hard not to burst out laughing.

"The t-t-towel," said the shivering Dunno.

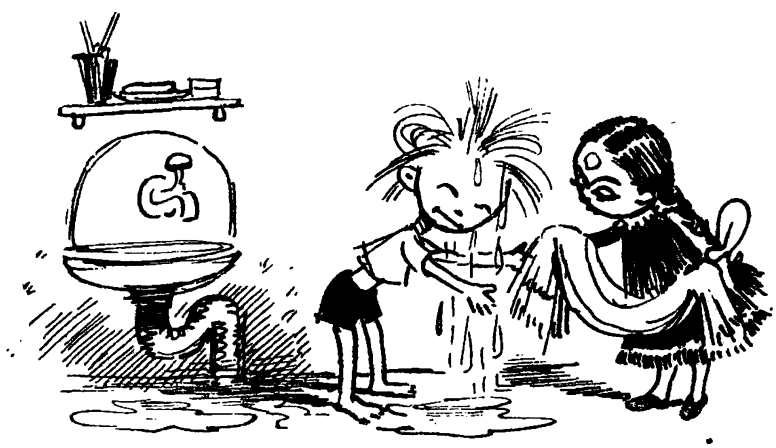
"How do you expect to find it with your eyes shut? Open them."

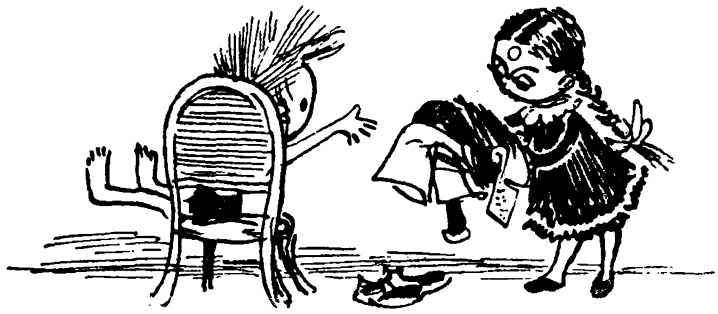
"And get them full of soap?"

"You wouldn't if you'd washed it off properly."

Cornflower took down the towel and handed it to him. Only when he had rubbed his face for about five minutes did he open his eyes.

"You look ever so much cleaner and handsomer," said Cornflower, but





on seeing the streaks of dirt left on the towel, she added: "I was very lenient with you this time. Next time you'll have to wash more thoroughly."

Then she brought him his clothes.

"Come upstairs and have tea when you're dressed," she said. "You must be hungry, aren't you?"

"Starved," admitted Dunno. "I could eat an elephant."

"Poor dear," said Cornflower. "Well, hurry up, we'll be waiting for you."

Chapter Thirteen

DUNNO TELLS OF HIS ADVENTURES

Dunno got dressed quickly and went up the creaking wooden staircase to the second floor. He found himself in a room that was somewhat smaller but much cosier than the one downstairs. Two fan-shaped windows hung with pretty curtains looked out on the street. Between the windows was a door that opened on to a balcony. In the middle of the room stood a table with all sorts of plates and platters on it filled with pies, cakes, cookies, tarts, doughnuts, macaroons, and many other delicious things. It was clear that the girl-Mites had decided to give Dunno a feast. His head fairly swam when he looked at the table.

The girl-Mite with the bow on top of her head and the one with the pigtails were pouring out tea, while the curly-head was taking some sweets out of the sideboard.

Cornflower introduced Dunno to her friends. The girl-Mite with the pigtails was named Chippy, the one with the bow—Bunny, and the curly-head—Flitty. Dunno wanted nothing so much as to sit down and eat, but four more little girls came in and he had to be introduced to them.

"These are our neighbours: Minny, Winny, Margy and Fluff," said Cornflower.

Dunno found himself surrounded by girl-Mites.

"Did you come here in a balloon?" asked the black-haired Minny.

"Yes, I did," said Dunno importantly, one eye on the table.

"Weren't you afraid to go up in a balloon?" asked the fat little Fluff.

"Terribly ... er ... that is ... not the least little bit!" said Dunno.

"How brave you are! I wouldn't go up in a balloon for anything in the world!" said Winny.

"Where do you come from?" asked Margy.

"Flower Town."

"Where's that?"

"Out there," said Dunno, waving his hand vaguely. "Beyond Cucumber River."

"I never heard of such a river," said Minny. "It must be awfully far away."

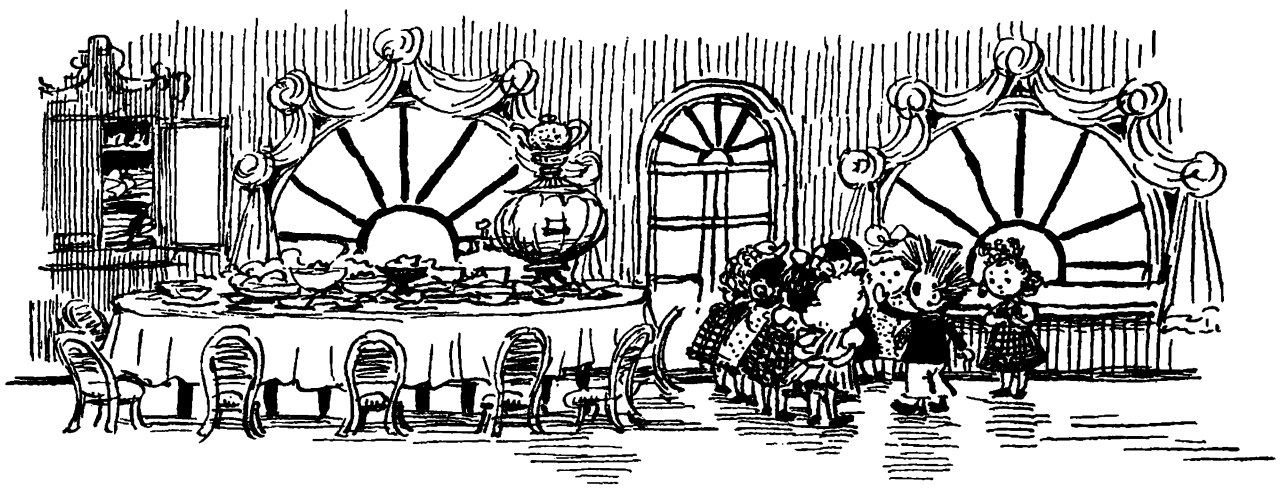
"Awfully," agreed Dunno.

"Do come to the table before the tea gets cold," said Cornflower.

Dunno did not have to be asked twice. In a second he was in his place and stuffing his mouth with pies and cakes and jam and sweets. His companions ate almost nothing, so anxious were they to hear all about the balloon. At last Flitty could restrain herself no longer.

"Who had the idea of sailing up in the air in a balloon?" she asked.

"I did," said Dunno, working his jaws with all his might as he gobbled up one cake after another.



"You don't say so! Was it really you?" came from all sides of the table.

"Word of honour!" said Dunno, almost choking over a raisin.

"How very interesting! Tell us all about it," said Fluff.

"What's there to tell?" said Dunno with a shrug of his shoulders. "The Mites kept after me to think of something for them to do. 'Do think of something,' they kept saying. 'I'm sick of thinking of things for you,' I said, 'think of something yourselves.' 'Us?' they said. 'As if we could think of anything! It's you who has the brains! It's easy as pie for you to think of things!' 'Very well,' I said, 'I s'pose I'll have to.' And so I began to think."

With a look of deep concentration, Dunno fell to chewing a bun. The girl-Mites watched him impatiently. When the bun was finished and he stretched out his hand for another, Chippy could stand it no longer.

"You were saying that you ... er ... began to think ...." she said.

"So I did," said Dunno, bringing his bun down on the table with the air of one who has just been wakened out of a dream. "For three days and three nights I thought, and at the end of that time I said to my friends: 'I've thought of something, you chaps! I've thought of a balloon!' And so we set about making a balloon. Posey (there's a poet by that name where I come from)—Posey has even written a poem about me. It begins: 'Our Dunno has made a balloon' ... or perhaps: 'A balloon has been made by our Dunno'... or rather: 'Ours the balloon that Dunno has made....' Dash! I've forgotten how it begins. So many poems have been written about me I get them all mixed up."

Dunno helped himself to a slice of jam tart.

"How did you make the balloon?" asked Cornflower.

"It was a lot of work, you may be sure. My helpers worked day and night. Some of them smeared on the rubber, others worked the pump, and I just walked about whistling a tune—that is, not exactly whistling,

but giving orders. Nobody could do a thing without me. I had to explain everything to them and show them what to do. A terrible responsibility. The balloon might have burst any minute. I have two assistants, Bendum and Twistum—expert tinkers. They can do anything with their hands, but not with their heads. Everything's got to be shown and explained to them. So I explained to them how to make the boiler. They made things hum. The boiler boiled, the water bubbled and the steam hissed out of the pipe! What a fuss there was!"

The girls listened to him with bated breath.

"What then? What happened next?" they asked when he paused.

"At last came the day when we were to take off," went on Dunno. "Thousands of Mites came to see it. Some of them said the balloon was sure to rise, others said it wouldn't, and a fight began. The ones who said it would, pounded those who said it wouldn't, and those who said it wouldn't, pounded those who said it would. Or maybe it was just the opposite: those who said it would, pounded those who said it wouldn't. Or maybe it was the other way round. In a word, you couldn't tell who was pounding whom. Everybody was pounding everybody else."

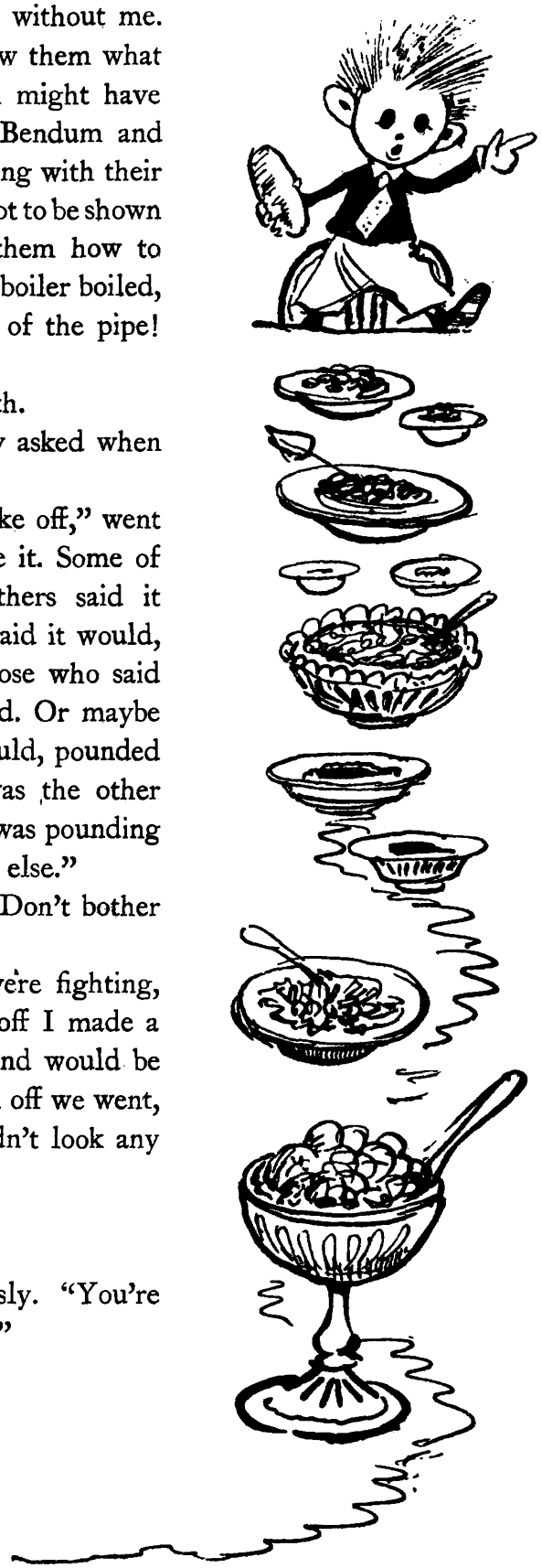
"That doesn't matter," said Cornflower. "Don't bother about the fight, tell us about the balloon."

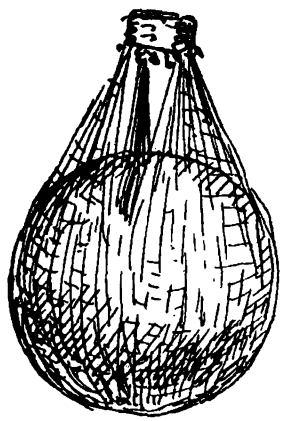
"Very well," said Dunno. "While they were fighting, we climbed into the basket. Before we took off I made a little speech about how we were taking off and would be away for a long time and said good-bye. Then off we went, up and up, until the ground down below didn't look any bigger than this jam tart."

"Not really!" gasped the girl-Mites.

"Honest to goodness," said Dunno.

"Don't interrupt!" said Cornflower crossly. "You're holding up the story. He wouldn't fib to us."





"True," said Dunno, "you really shouldn't interrupt my fibbing ... that is, my story."

"Go on, go on!" they all cried in chorus.

"So this is how it was," said Dunno. "We were sailing up and up, higher and higher, and then, all of a sudden—bang! The balloon came to a dead stop. We had bumped into a cloud. What were we to do? It didn't take me long to decide. I took out my axe and chopped a hole in the cloud. We started climbing again, but this time we were sailing upside down—the sky under our feet, the ground over our heads."

"Why was that?" asked his astonished listeners.

"A law of nature," said Dunno. "Once you're up above the clouds, you fly upside down. On we went, up and up, till we got to the very top, and there it's cold as cold—one thousand and two-tenths degrees below zero. Everything froze and the balloon cooled off and began to fall. But I'm a smart one, I am—I knew this would happen, and so I had put some sacks filled with sand in the balloon beforehand, and we threw them out, one after another, until they were all gone, but still the balloon kept falling. What were we to do? There was a fellow with us named Doono—a bit of a funk. When he saw the balloon falling he got scared and began to cry, and then all of a sudden he took a parachute and jumped out and went home. The basket was lighter and the balloon began to rise into the air again. But this didn't last long. Down it came, lickity-split. It crashed into the earth! It bounced up again! Then it crashed down again! And out I fell—plop!—right on my head."

Dunno was so carried away by his story that he brought his fist down on his plate, sending the jam out of the tart flying in all directions. The girl-Mites gave such a start that they almost fell off their chairs.

"What happened next?" they asked when they had recovered.

"That's all I remember."

For a moment nobody said a word. The girl-Mites just sat there looking at Dunno in awe. He was a true hero in their eyes.

"Your balloon gave us an awful fright," said Cornflower at last. "We were having tea out on the balcony when we saw an enormous balloon sailing down on our house. All of a sudden it bumped into the fence and burst. Bang! We rushed over to it, but the only thing we found was a birch-bark basket."

"You were lying on the ground as if dead," put in Bunny.

"One of your boots was on your foot, the other on the fence, and your hat was hanging on the branch of a tree," added Chippy.

"One sleeve was torn off your jacket and we found it only this morning," said Flitty. "We had to sew it back in a great hurry."

"How did I get in bed?" asked Dunno.

"We put you there. We couldn't leave you on the ground all night," said Cornflower.

"You were as good as dead," said Bunny. "But Honeysuckle said you were sure to come back to life because you had a strong . . . what do you call it?. . . con-sti-too-tion."

"True, I've got a strong constitution, but my head's even stronger," boasted Dunno. "Anyone else in my place would have been sure to get percussion of the brain."

"Not percussion—*con*cussion," corrected Cornflower.

"That's right—concussion," agreed Dunno.

"But I thought you said you weren't alone in the balloon?" said Cornflower.

"I wasn't. There were sixteen of us. Doono, it's true, jumped out, but that left fifteen."

"Where are they?" asked Minny.

"Don't know," said Dunno with a shrug of his shoulders. "Didn't you find anybody in the basket?"

"The only thing we found in the basket was a box of paints and a doctor's bag."

"The paints belong to Blobs and the bag to Dr. Pillman," said Dunno.

At that moment the door opened and Snowdrop ran into the room.

"Have you heard the news?" she cried. "The very newest of news! Another balloon has come down and burst. There were fourteen boy-Mites in it. They fell last night on the edge of town and our girls found them early this morning and helped them get to the hospital."

"And are they all hurt?" gasped Chippy.

"Not badly," said Snowdrop with a wave of her hand. "Honeysuckle says she'll put them all back on their feet."

"They must be my friends," said Dunno. "I'll go directly to the hospital and find out."

"I'll go with you," said Cornflower.

"I will too," said Snowdrop.

It was then that she noticed the circle of plaster on Cornflower's forehead.

"Oh, my dear! How sweet it looks!" she cried. "I want to wear a piece, too. Is it the latest thing?"

"Of course not," sniffed Cornflower. "It's plaster. I happened to bump my head."

"Oh, is that all?" said Snowdrop disappointedly as she went over to the looking-glass and put on her hat.

In a minute the room was empty. Everyone had run off to tell the news to the neighbours.

Chapter Fourteen

A WALK ABOUT TOWN

Snowdrop, Cornflower, and Dunno went out into a street that was lined by fences made of thin willow wands. Behind the fences could be seen pretty houses with red and green roofs. Above the houses towered enormous apple, pear, and plum trees. The trees grew out in the streets as well as in the gardens. There were so many trees and bushes that the town was called "Greenville."

Dunno glanced about him curiously. Everything was spotlessly clean. Girl-Mites could be seen at work in every garden. Some of them were cutting the grass, others were sweeping the pathways, and still others were beating the dust out of long runners made of carpet. These runners were

laid not only on the floors of the houses in Greenville, but on the pavements and streets as well. Some of the housewives were so afraid that passers-by would dirty their carpets that they stood at the fences and begged them not to walk on them, or if they did, to wipe their feet carefully first. Many of the front gardens had runners on the paths, and the outside of the houses were hung with bright rugs.

In Greenville the water-supply flowed through pipes made of reed. Reed, as everyone knows, is hollow, and so serves very well as pipes. They were not laid in the ground as you might think, but up above the ground, on wooden posts so that they would not rot. The Mites watched for leaks and tended them carefully, and so they lasted a long time. The main water-pipe had a branch leading into every house. Besides this, every house had a fountain in front of it. This was beneficial as well as beautiful, for the water that ran over the edge of the fountain was used to water the gardens. Every household had a kitchen garden with beets, carrots, turnips, radishes, and other vegetables growing in it.

Dunno saw some girls gathering vegetables in one of the gardens. First they dug the earth away from a turnip or a carrot, then they tied a rope to the top of it and pulled with all their might. When the turnip or carrot came out by the root, the girls dragged it home with much shouting and laughing.

"How is it I see nothing but girls in your town? Aren't there any boys here?" asked Dunno.

"No, there aren't. All the boys have gone to live on the river-bank. They've built their own town called 'Kite Town.'"

"Why have they done that?" asked Dunno.

"They like it better there. They spend the whole day lying in the sun and swimming in the summer, and skating on the ice in the winter. In spring they have lots of fun when the river rises and floods their town."

"What fun do they find in that?" asked the amazed Dunno.

"I don't know," said Snowdrop, "but our boy-Mites like it. They go about in boats saving each other. They're very fond of adventures."

"So am I," said Dunno. "Do you s'pose I could make the 'quaintance of your boy-Mites?"

"No, you couldn't," said Snowdrop. "First of all, it takes a whole hour to get to Kite Town; secondly, our boys will put bad ideas into your head; and thirdly, we aren't on speaking terms with them."

"Why is that?"

"There's a very good reason," said Cornflower. "Last winter they invited us to a New Year's party, saying there would be music and dancing, and when we got there, do you know what they did? Threw snowballs at us!"

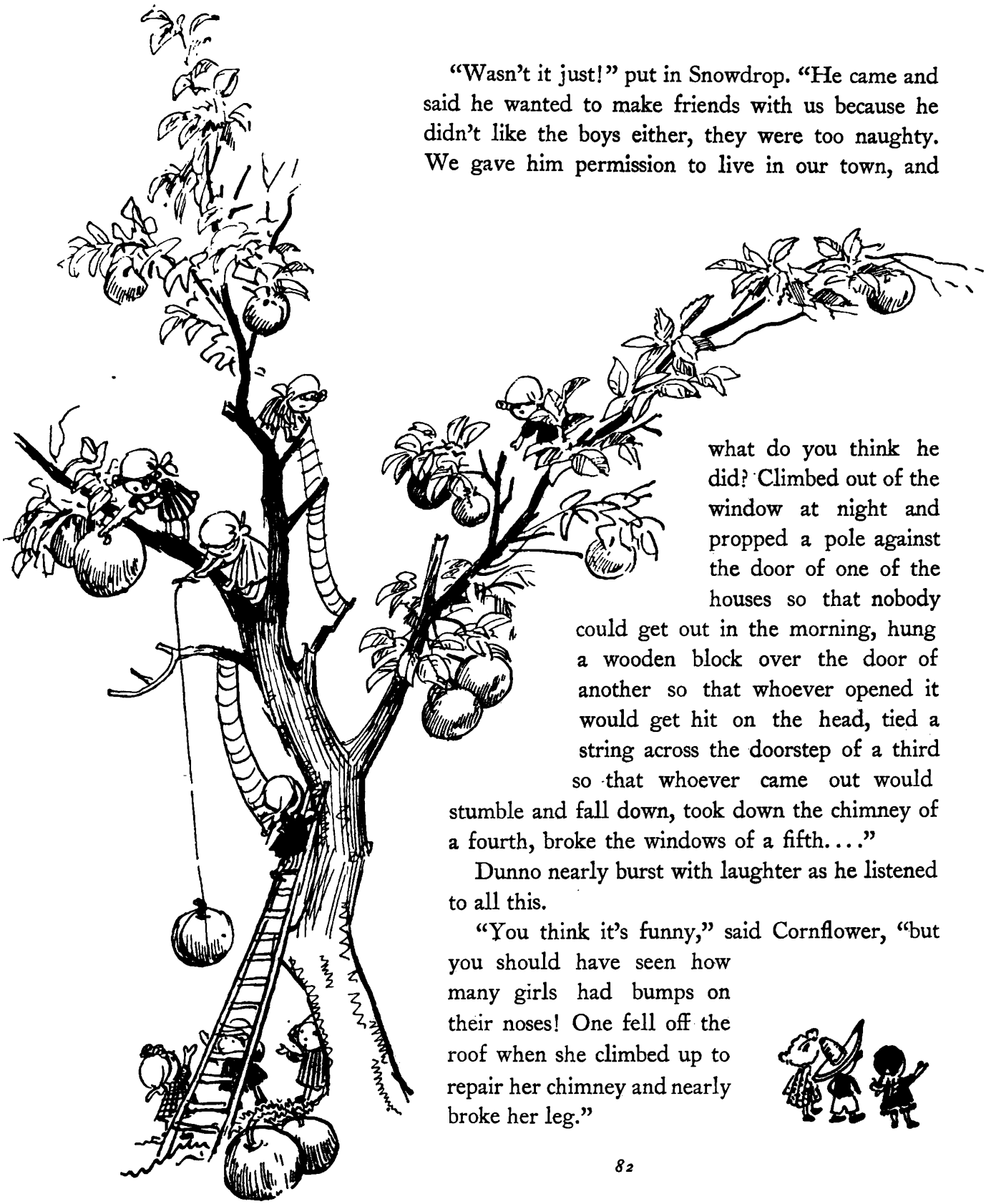
"What of it?" said Dunno.

"What of it? We haven't spoken to them since. None of us ever goes to see them."

"And don't they come to see you?"

"No, they don't. At first some of them tried it, but you can be sure there was not a girl who would play with them. We snubbed them so completely that they began to make mischief—break windows and tear down fences," said Snowdrop.

"Then they sent a harum-scarum by the name of Nails to our town," said Cornflower. "That was something."



"Wasn't it just!" put in Snowdrop. "He came and said he wanted to make friends with us because he didn't like the boys either, they were too naughty. We gave him permission to live in our town, and what do you think he did? Climbed out of the window at night and propped a pole against the door of one of the houses so that nobody could get out in the morning, hung a wooden block over the door of another so that whoever opened it would get hit on the head, tied a string across the doorstep of a third so that whoever came out would stumble and fall down, took down the chimney of a fourth, broke the windows of a fifth. . . ."

Dunno nearly burst with laughter as he listened to all this.

"You think it's funny," said Cornflower, "but you should have seen how many girls had bumps on their noses! One fell off the roof when she climbed up to repair her chimney and nearly broke her leg."

"I'm not laughing at the girls," said Dunno. "I'm laughing at that fellow Nails."

"You oughtn't to laugh at him, you ought to punish him, so that he'd never want to do such wicked things again," said Snowdrop.

At that moment they were walking past an apple-tree that grew in the middle of the street. All of its branches were loaded with ripe red apples. A wooden ladder had been placed against it, but it only reached half-way up the trunk. Rope ladders hung from the top branches. Two girls were up in the tree. One of them was sawing through the stem of an apple, the other was holding her so that she didn't fall off.

"Be careful," Cornflower warned Dunno. "An apple may drop on your head and kill you."

"Not me!" said Dunno boastfully. "I've got a thick skull!"

"The boys think they're terribly brave, but we're quite as brave as they are," said Snowdrop. "Just see how high those two girls have climbed."

"But girls don't go up in balloons and ride round in motor cars," said Dunno.

"Oh, don't they?" said Snowdrop. "Lots of our girls know how to drive."

"Why, do you have a car?"

"We do. But it's out of order now. We don't know how to repair it. Perhaps you'll help us?"

"Indeed I will," said Dunno. "I know a thing or two about cars. As soon as Bendum and Twistum get out of the hospital I'll have them repair it for you."

"Oh, thank you!" said Snowdrop, clapping her hands.

At this moment Dunno's eyes lighted on a marvel he had never seen before. In the middle of the street lay great green balls as big as a two-, or even a three-storey house.

"Are they balloons, too?" he asked.

Snowdrop and Cornflower laughed.

"They're water-melons," they said. "Haven't you ever seen a water-melon before?"

"Never," admitted Dunno. "Water-melons don't grow where I come from. What are they for?"

"A boy that doesn't know what a water-melon's for!" laughed Snowdrop. "In a minute you'll be asking me what apples and pears are for."

"Do you mean to say you eat them?" asked the astonished Dunno. "It would take a year to eat anything that size."

"We don't eat them," said Cornflower. "We drain the juice out of them. "It's like syrup. If you make a hole in the bottom of a water-melon, you can get several barrels of syrup from a single melon."

"Who ever thought of planting them?" said Dunno.

"A very clever little girl named Thistle," said Cornflower. "She adores raising fruit and vegetables and getting new sorts. We never used to have water-melons, but one day somebody said she had seen wild water-melons growing in the woods. That autumn Thistle headed an expedition which searched the woods until they found the wild water-melons. They brought back the seeds, and the next spring Thistle planted them. The melons from these seeds were very big, but the juice was sour. Thistle worked day and night, tasting all the melons until she found one whose juice was not so sour. The next year she planted the seeds of this melon. The new fruit had sweeter juice. Again Thistle selected the sweetest of all and planted seeds from this melon the next year. She kept on doing this year after year until she got water-melons as sweet as honey."

"Now everybody praises Thistle, but they used to scold her," said Snowdrop.

"What did they scold her for?" asked Dunno.

"Nobody believed any good would come of those melons. And besides, the whole town was full of them—you could hardly walk down the street for the water-melons. Often they grew next to houses. That didn't matter so long as they were small, but when they got big they threatened to push down the walls. One house really did cave in because of a water-melon.

Some of our girls wanted to forbid the planting of water-melons, but others stood up for Thistle and helped her in her work."

By this time they had come to the edge of the river.

"This is called Water-Melon River," said Snowdrop. "See how many melons are growing along the bank."

A narrow bridge that looked very much like a strip of carpet was thrown from one bank to the other. It was made of very thick and strong stuff.

"We built it," said Cornflower. "It took us a month to weave the stuff, then the boys helped to stretch it across the river."

"That was great fun!" said Snowdrop. "One of them fell in the water and was almost drowned, but somebody pulled him out."

Cornflower walked boldly up on the bridge and crossed to the other side. Dunno walked up just as boldly but he stopped when he felt it sway.

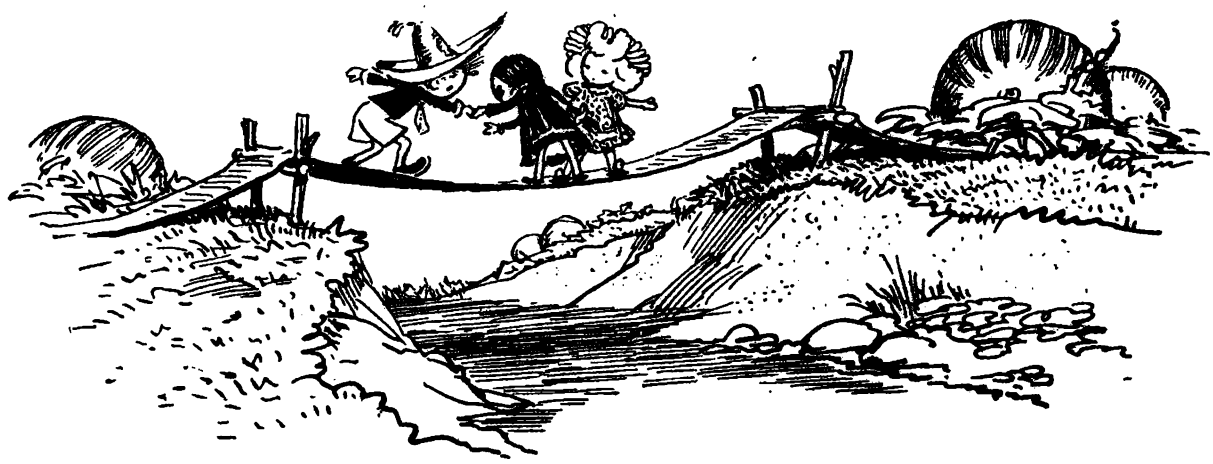
"Why have you stopped?" asked Snowdrop. "Are you afraid?"

"Of course not. I was just thinking what a funny bridge it is."

He stooped down and held on to the sides, laughing to show that he was not afraid.

Snowdrop took one of his hands, Cornflower the other, and together they led him over the bridge. Both of them could see he was afraid, but they didn't laugh at him because they knew that boy-Mites couldn't bear to be laughed at. On reaching the other side, they went down the street until they came to a white house with a green roof.

"This is our hospital," said Cornflower.



Chapter Fifteen

IN THE HOSPITAL

They went up to the door and Snowdrop rang a little bell that went "ding-a-ling-a-ling." The door was opened by a nurse in a white smock and cap, and with a row of golden curls bouncing up and down on her forehead.

"Goodness gracious! Another patient!" she gasped when she saw them. "There's no place to put him, upon my word! Where in the world do they come from? For a whole year our hospital's been empty, and today we've taken in fourteen patients!"

"This isn't a patient," said Snowdrop. "He's come to see his friends."

"Oh, if that's the case, come in."

All three of them went into the doctor's office. They found Honeysuckle sitting at a desk. In front of her lay a heap of cards on which she was writing what was wrong with each patient. As soon as she caught sight of Snowdrop and Cornflower, she said:

"I suppose you've come to see the patients? I can't allow it. You forget that sick people need peace and quiet. What's that on your forehead, Cornflower—a plaster? Clever girl! I warned you it would come to that. Nobody knows better than I do how dangerous those boys are. Let one in the house, and you can expect nothing but kicks and bruises."

"We don't want to see the patients," said Snowdrop. "He does. They're his friends."

"Hm, I told that young fellow to stay in bed, and here he is, up and about in defiance of doctor's orders and picking a fight with everybody. I can't let him in here. The hospital is no place for fighting."

"I won't fight," said Dunno.

"Oh, you won't, won't you?" said Honeysuckle sternly, striking the

table with her wooden trumpet. "Boys always say they won't fight, but they always do."

Honeysuckle seemed to think the matter dismissed, for she turned to Cornflower, and said:

"Show me your forehead, dear."

She pulled off the plaster and examined the sore spot.

"You don't need to wear this plaster any more," she said when the examination was over. "Come with me, dear. I'll treat your bump with ultra-violet rays so that it doesn't turn black and blue."

She and Cornflower went out of the room. As soon as they were gone Dunno caught sight of a white smock and cap hanging on a hook. He instantly put them on, and he also put on a pair of spectacles Honeysuckle had left lying on the desk. Then he picked up her wooden trumpet and went out of the room. Snowdrop stood watching him in awe and admiration.

He went down the corridor and opened the door of the ward in which his friends lay. In the first bed he found Grumps who was looking more surly and sullen than ever.

"How are you feeling, my friend?" said Dunno, changing his voice.

"Wonderful!" said Grumps, making a face as if he were to die.

"Sit up, if you please," said Dunno.

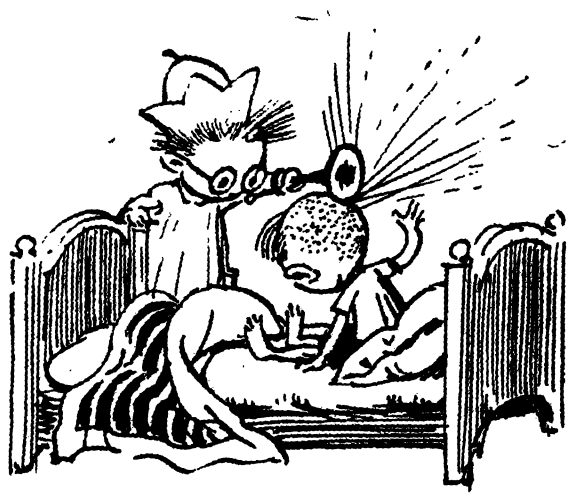
Grumps sat up with a great effort and stared dully in front of him. Dunno put the wooden trumpet to his chest.

"Breathe deeply, if you please," he said.

"Can't you give a man any peace?" grumbled Grumps. "'Sit up!' 'Lie down!' 'Breathe deeply!' 'Stop breathing!'"

Dunno gave him a little whack on the head with the trumpet.

"You haven't changed in the least, Grumps," he said.



"Dunno!" he said, amazed at seeing him.

"Sh-sh!" warned Dunno.

"Listen, Dunno, help me get out of here," whispered Grumps. "I'm perfectly well, honestly I am. I just gave my knee a little bump. It doesn't even hurt any more, but they won't give me my clothes. I'll go mad here. I want to get up and go out."

Grumps seized Dunno by the sleeve and wouldn't let go.

"I'll do something," said Dunno. "Just be patient a little longer. Promise to do as I say, and if anybody asks you who made the balloon, tell them it was me, will you?"

"I'll say anything you like if you'll just get me out of here," said Grumps.

"Leave it to me," said Dunno with great self-assurance.

Then he went over to the next bed, where Dr. Pillman was lying.

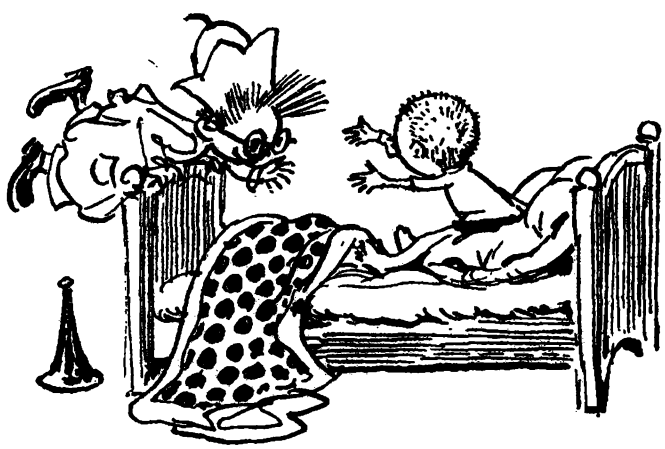
"Save me!" whispered Dr. Pillman in despair. "Just think of it! All my life I've been making people well, and now they want to make me well!"

"Why shouldn't they?" asked Dunno.

"How can they!" said Dr. Pillman. "There's nothing wrong with me. You can't keep a person in the hospital just because he's got a scratch on his nose and a bruise on his shoulder!"

"Then what do they keep you here for?"

"Because they haven't any other patients and they want to take care of somebody. Girls! As if they knew anything! Bah! All they do is put plasters on the outside and honey inside. All wrong. What they want is to put iodine on the outside and castor oil inside. I heartily disapprove of their methods."



"I do too," chimed in P'raps from the next bed.

"No walking, no running, no hide-and-seek, no blind-man's-buff. Not even any singing. They've taken all our clothes away and given us nothing but handkerchiefs. All we can do is lie here and blow our noses."

"What did you come to the hospital for?"

"When we fell out of the basket last night we lay down to sleep. Next morning some girls woke us up and asked us where we were from. We told them we had come in a balloon that had crashed. 'Grashed!?' they said. 'Hurt!?' they said. 'Then you must come to our hospital.' And that's how we got here."

"And nobody was hurt?"

"Nobody but Shot."

Dunno went over to Shot's bed.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked.

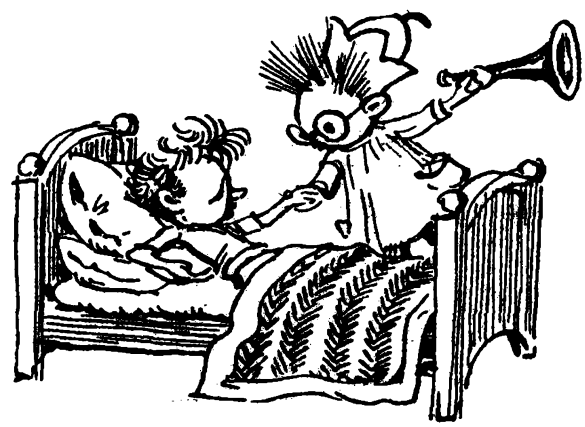
"Sprained my ankle. Can't walk at all. But that's not what troubles me. Dot's gone. Couldn't you find him for me? He must be somewhere about, but I can't look for him. Do look for him, that's a good chap."

"I will," said Dunno. "I'll find him for you. I will, that is, if you tell everybody I was the one who made the balloon."

Dunno went from bed to bed, warning all his friends to say that he was the one who had made the balloon. A last he went back to the doctor's office where Snowdrop was waiting for him impatiently.

"How are your sick friends?" she said.

"There's nothing wrong with them at all," said Dunno with a little laugh. "Shot's the only one who has anything the matter with him."



"So they'll soon be out of the hospital? How nice!" said Snowdrop. "Do you know what I've thought of? We'll give a ball to celebrate their getting well. Won't that be fun?"

"It doesn't look as if they were going to be let out very soon," said Dunno.

Just then Honeysuckle and Cornflower came back.

"Who told you you could put on that smock?" said Honeysuckle angrily. "I never saw such disobedience!"

"I wasn't disobedient," said Dunno. "I just went to see how my friends were."

"And how did you find them?" asked Honeysuckle mockingly.

"I found that all but one of them were well and could leave the hospital."

"What," said Honeysuckle in fright. "Can you imagine what would happen if we let out fourteen boys all at once? They would turn the town upside down! Not a house would have a whole window left in it, and all of us would be covered with bumps and bruises. The boys must be kept in hospital to prevent an epidemic of bumps and bruises."

"Maybe we could let them out one at a time?" suggested Cornflower. "One a day, perhaps?"

"That's too slow," put in Snowdrop. "At least two a day. We'll never be able to give a ball at that rate."

"One a day," insisted Honeysuckle. "We'll draw up a list and begin letting them out tomorrow."

"Two a day, darling! Two!" cried Snowdrop, throwing her arms about Honeysuckle and kissing her on the cheek. "I want so badly to give a ball! And you ought to come, too, you dance so beautifully!"

"Very well, two a day," said Honeysuckle. "We'll begin with the best-behaved. You must help us here," said she, turning to Dunno. "Who is the best-behaved?"

"They're all well-behaved," said Dunno.

"You can't make me believe that. Boys are never well-behaved. One has always got to think of some sort of work to keep them out of mischief."

"Then we'd better let out Bendum and Twistum first. They can begin mending the car as soon as they're out," said Cornflower.

"An excellent idea," said Honeysuckle. "So Bendum and Twistum head the list."

The tinkers' names were written down.

"I'd like to let Grumps out next," said Honeysuckle. He's such a nuisance, lying there grumbling all day long!"

"You mustn't," said Dunno. "Let him lie in hospital till he's cured of his grumbling."

"Then we'll let Dr. Pillman out next. He disapproves of our methods and criticizes everything we do. It's very hard to have to listen to him. I'd be very glad to get rid of him."

"You musn't let him out either," said Dunno. "He's been treating others all his life, let him get a dose of it himself. Let out Blobs. He's a good artist and we'll find work for him straightaway. He's my pupil. I'm the one who taught him to paint."

"Oh, do!" implored Snowdrop. "Couldn't you let him out this very minute?" I'll ask him to paint my portrait."

"And Trills," added Dunno. "He, too, is my pupil. I taught him to play the flute."

Snowdrop threw her arms about Honeysuckle's neck again.

"Do let out Blobs and Trills, darling," she cried. "Please, please do!"

"I suppose I might make an exception in their cases," she said. "But the others will have to wait their turn."

At last the list was drawn up. Honeysuckle gave orders to have the clothes of Blobs and Trills returned to them. A few minutes later both of them appeared in her office beaming with pleasure.

"We are letting you out," said Honeysuckle. "See that you behave yourselves, or we'll put you straight back in hospital."

Chapter Sixteen

THE CONCERT

Soon the whole town heard that a famous traveller, Dunno, and his friends, were being treated in the local hospital. Minny and Fluff ran from house to house telling their friends the news. These friends told others, the others told still others, and in the end all the inhabitants of Greenville flocked to the hospital. Everyone wanted to help the sufferers in some way, and so they all brought presents. One brought a home-made cake, another brought a pot of jam, a third brought some stewed fruit.

In half an hour Hospital Lane was crowded with visitors. Naturally, such a crowd could not be admitted to the hospital. Honeysuckle came out on the porch and said the patients had everything they needed and please wouldn't everybody go home and stop making such a noise. But the visitors did not want to go home. In some unknown way they had got wind of the fact that Dunno, the Traveller-in-Chief, was expected to leave the hospital accompanied by his friends Blobs and Trills.

Once more Honeysuckle appeared on the porch and said that Dunno would not leave the hospital until the crowd had broken up. There was nothing for it but to break up, but instead of going home, the girls went into the houses of their friends who lived in Hospital Lane. When Dunno, Blobs and Trills came out accompanied by Cornflower and Snowdrop, they felt dozens of pairs of eyes staring at them from behind windows and doors. Dunno found such popularity very flattering.

"Which is Dunno, the famous Dunno?" he heard somebody whisper.

"The one in the yellow trousers," came the answer.

"That flap-eared fellow? I'd never have thought *he* was Dunno. He looks rather a dunce."

"He does, doesn't he? But there's something about his expression. He's the one, take my word for it."

A girl at a second-storey window of the corner house began to wave her hands wildly as soon as Dunno appeared.

"Dunno! Dunno!" she shouted. "Hurrah for Dunno!"

And she leaned so far out of the window that she almost fell into the street. Fortunately her friends caught her by the leg and pulled her back.

"Shame on you!" said a Mite with a sharp little face and a pointed chin. "You'll make that Dunno think he's the cock of the walk."

"Quite right, Birdie," agreed her friend, who had a short upper lip and flashing white teeth. "Boys should never be allowed to think you take any notice of them. If they see that nobody pays any attention to their tricks, they'll stop doing them."

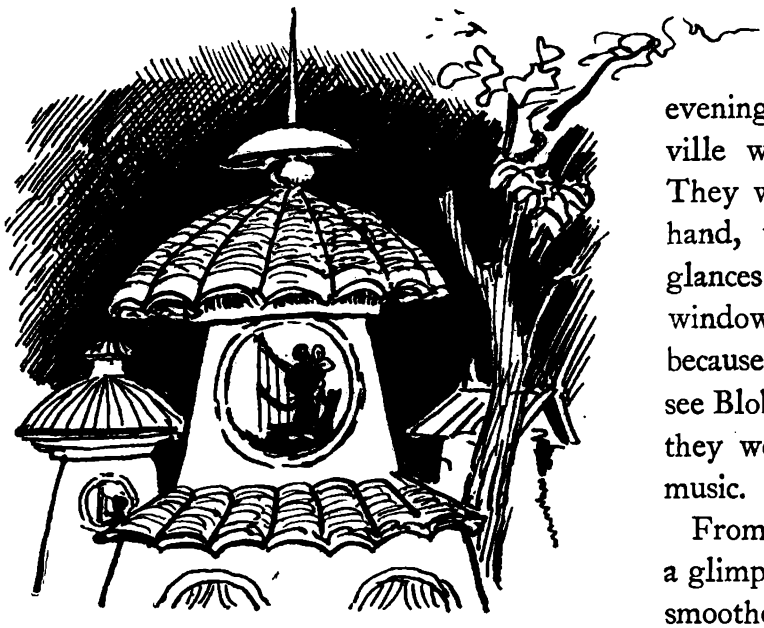
"Just what I was saying, Kitty," agreed Birdie. "Boys are to be looked down upon. Once they know you look down upon them, they'll be afraid to hurt you."

And Birdie and Kitty began to whisper into every ear that the newly-arrived boys were to be looked down upon. They got all the girls to agree not to pay the slightest attention to them, and cross to the other side of the street if they saw one coming.

But nothing came of this agreement. It was discovered that Blobs was an artist and Trills a musician who played beautifully on the flute. Everyone was dying to hear him, for the harp was the only instrument played in Greenville and nobody had ever heard a flute. Many of the inhabitants didn't even know there was such an instrument.

A little while later they learned that Blobs and Trills had moved into Button's house on Apple Square. There was a big room on the second floor of this house with a window that took up a whole wall. The room was so light and airy that Blobs was instantly taken by it, and he and Trills decided to move in.

The window of their room looked out on Apple Square. Never had Apple Square been a favourite place for walking in the evening, but this



evening everybody in Greenville was promenading there. They walked in pairs, hand in hand, up and down, stealing glances at the second-storey window. This, of course, was not because they had any desire to see Blobs and Trills, but because they were anxious to hear the music.

From time to time they caught a glimpse of Trills with his hair smoothed down so neatly, or of Blobs with his hair sticking out in all directions. Once they saw Blobs come and lean on the window-sill and gaze dreamily into space. He was joined by Trills, with whom he entered into a heated discussion, turning his head from side to side and waving his arms about. Then both of them went away.

It appeared that nothing more of interest would happen that night, but still nobody went home. And it was a good thing they didn't, for in a little while the notes of a flute, as gentle as the babbling of a brook, came from the second-storey window. Now they rose one after another, as wave follows wave; now they leaped up, tumbling and chasing one another in the air. It was bright, lively music and put everyone in a gay mood. The sounds of the flute seemed to tug at their arms and legs, urging them to dance.

One by one the windows of the houses were opened softly. All movement stopped in the square. Everyone stood still, afraid to miss a single note of the music.

At last the flute grew silent, but from the window of a house on the other side of the square came the strain of a harp. It seemed to be echo-

ing the melody played by the flute. Someone's fingers were picking it out hesitantly on the strings. Little by little the bright tune faded, and when it was just about to die away the flute took it up again. This encouraged the harp to go on playing. Soon a second harp joined in, and a third, and the tune grew brighter and gayer than ever.

It was just at this point that Dunno came running up, bringing some paints and brushes for Blobs. He was quite taken aback by the sight of all these girls listening with bated breath to the music. He, too, stopped to listen, and he even cut a caper or two in the hope of attracting attention. But nobody paid him any notice and so he dodged into the entrance to Button's house.

Chapter Seventeen

BENDUM AND TWISTUM GO TO KITE TOWN

Hurry, hurry, come outdoors,
Form in line in twos and fours,
Boy- and girl-Mites of all sizes,
Start the day with exercises!

It was with this song, written by the poet Posey, that Bendum and Twistum started their day. The inhabitants of Greenville were still asleep when the two tinkers went marching down the street singing their song and doing setting-up exercises.

On the previous evening they had heard they were to be let out of hospital so that they could mend the girl-Mites' car. And so, long before

the sun even thought of coming up they began demanding that they be given their clothes. Honeysuckle, who feared nothing so much as a scene, decided she had better let them out as quickly as possible.

And now here they were marching down the street, waking up the inhabitants of Greenville with their singing. Some of the girls rushed to the windows to see what was happening, others came out of doors.

"Where's your garage, girls?" cried Bendum.

"Here, I'll show you," said a girl in a red hood and a blue coat with a collar of fluffy silver caterpillar.

"Are we to turn right or left?" asked Bendum.

"Right," answered their guide, stealing a look at their leather jackets.

"Right turn! Quick march!" commanded Bendum. "Left, right! Left, right!"

Twistum marched at his heels, and their guide had all she could do to keep up with them. So quickly did Bendum and Twistum march that they went straight past the gate where they should have halted.

"Stop, stop!" called their guide. "You've gone past!"

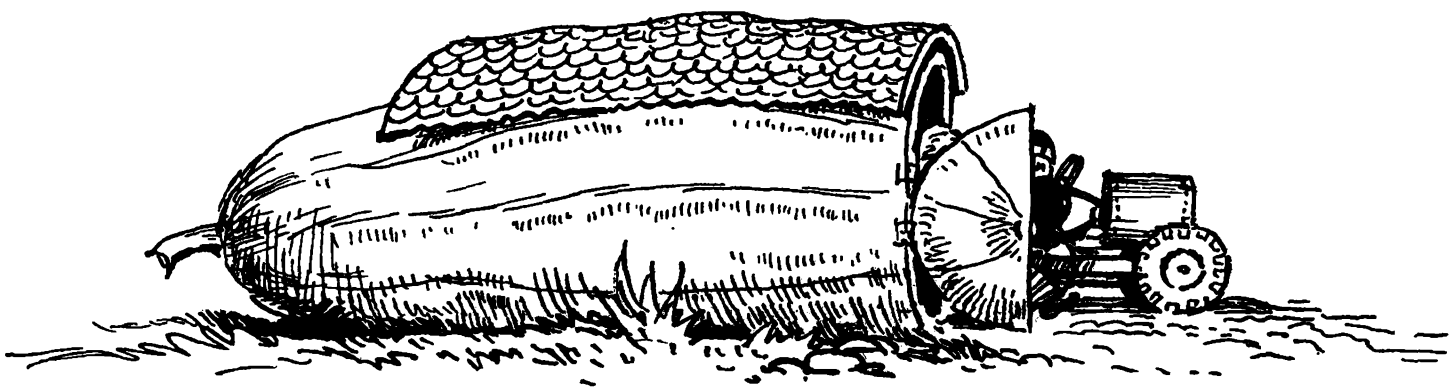
"About turn!" commanded Bendum. Back they came and through the gate that their guide held open for them. They found themselves in a courtyard that had a shed with a tiled roof at the far end.

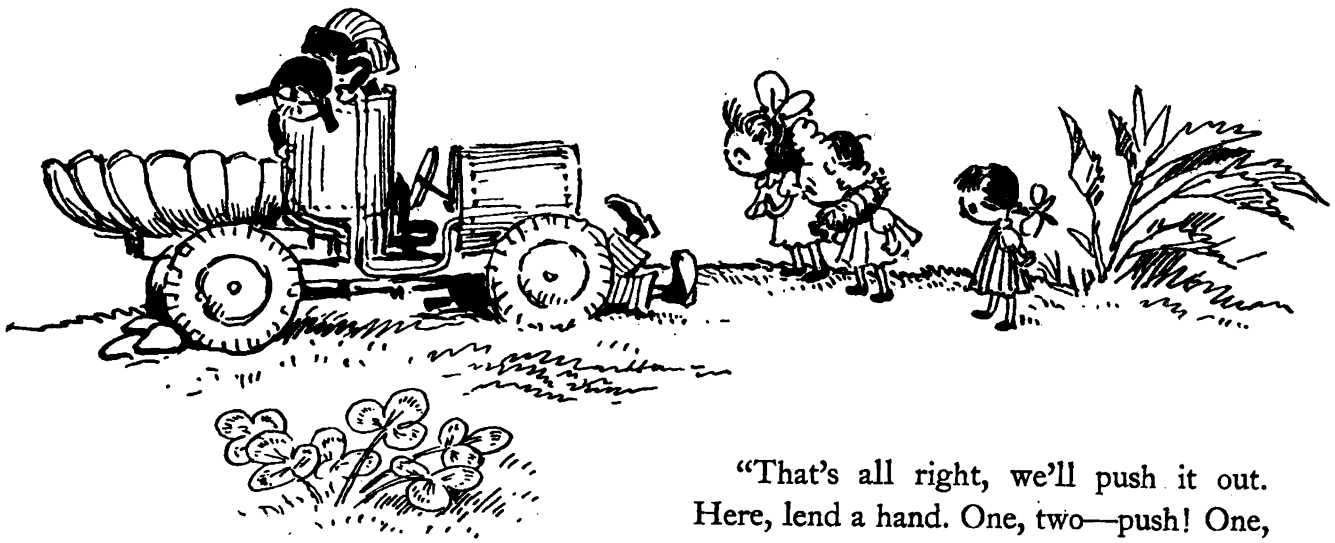
"Call this a garage? It's just an old ramshackle shed," said Twistum as he opened the double doors. Inside stood a car.

By this time some other girls had entered the yard.

"It's dark in this shed," said Bendum. "Let's take the car out."

"But it doesn't run, it's out of order," said the girls.





"That's all right, we'll push it out. Here, lend a hand. One, two—push! One, two—push!"

With a squeak and a squawk the car rolled out.

In a minute Bendum and Twistum were underneath it, while the amazed girls watched them admiringly.

"Umph! The tank leaks," came from under the car. "Tck, tck, tck! A bolt's loose. Hm! The syrup pipe's burst!"

In a little while they crawled out.

"Give us a monkey-wrench, some pliers, a hammer, and a soldering-iron," said Bendum.

"We don't have any of those things."

"You don't? What *do* you have?"

"A saw and an axe."

"You can't mend cars with an axe. Aren't there any boys about?"

"All the boys live in Kite Town."

"Is that far away?"

"About an hour's walk."

"If it takes you an hour, it'll take us less. Tell us how to get there."

"Turn to the right at the end of this street, keep going straight ahead till you come to the road that cuts through the fields, follow the road, and it will bring you to Kite Town."

"Clear enough," said Bendum. "Quick march! But wait—while we're

away, find some old rags and clean the car. Motor cars like to be taken good care of."

"We will," said the girls.

"Good-bye. Quick march!"

And off they went. As soon as they got to the end of the street Bendum gave the command to sing, and the two of them began at the top of their voices:

Off we went, my friend and I,
As the sun rose in the sky,
Over dale and over hill,
Bright with yellow daffodil.
Suddenly we met a toad
Hopping toward us down the road,
Home we ran as fast as fast,
I ran first and he ran last.

When that song was finished they sang another, then another. Soon they were out of town and walking through the fields. When they had been on their way almost an hour and were in sight of Kite Town they came upon a car standing in the middle of the road. There was nobody

inside it, but they saw a pair of legs in a pair of greasy black trousers sticking out from under it.

"Taking a sun-bath, shorty?" called out Twistum.

A curly dark head was thrust out from between the wheels.

"Oh, yes. A sun-bath under the car," was the reply.

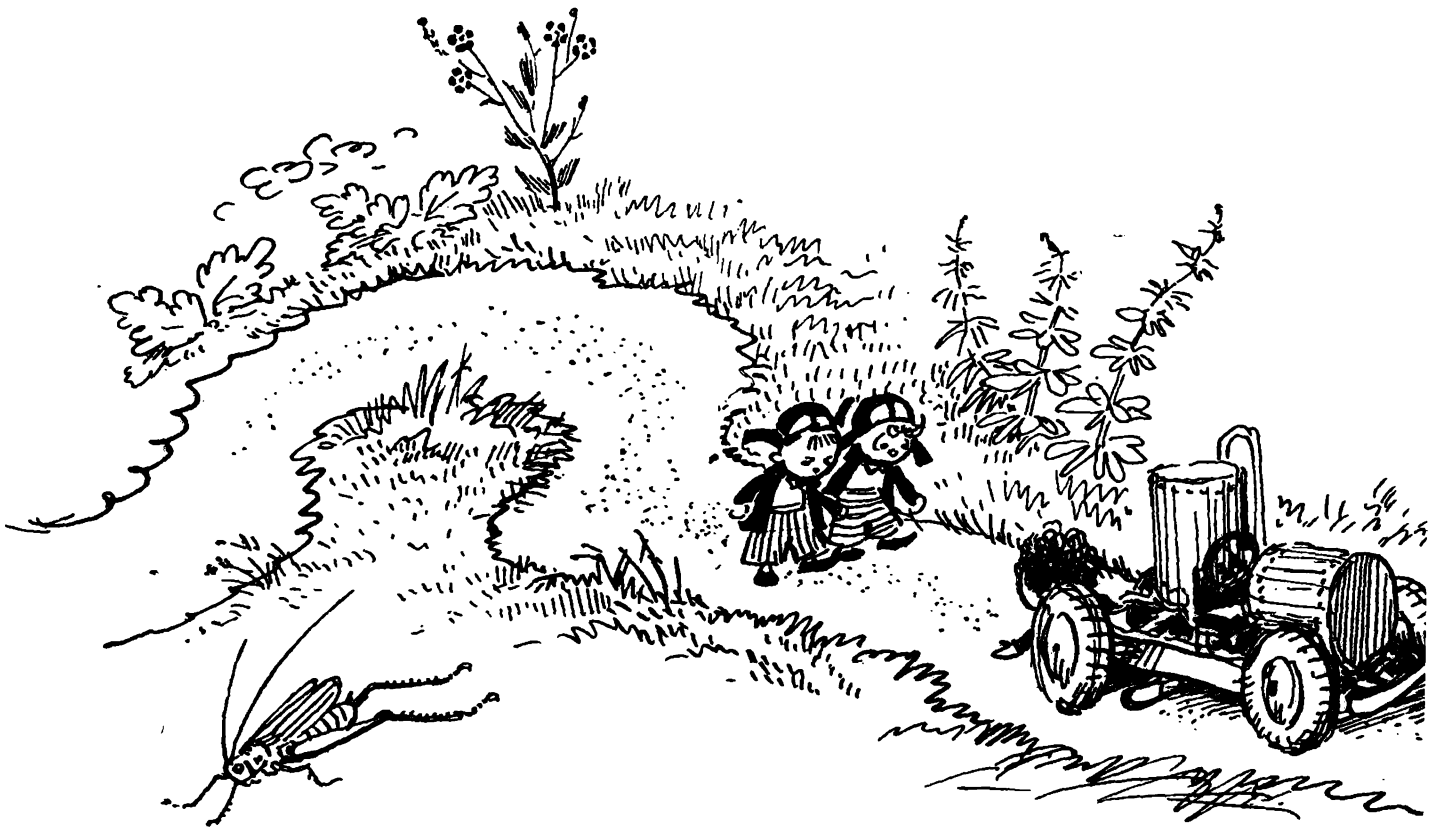
"What's the trouble?"

"Not enough syrup or too much soda-water—I can't make out which, hang it all!"

He crawled out from under and gave one of the wheels a kick.

His jacket, like his trousers, was so black and greasy that it shone like patent leather. Evidently the poor chap spent more time under his car than in it, as is often the case with owners of soda-water cars.

Bendum walked round and round, studying the machine, and when he could find nothing wrong up above, he dived underneath. He fussed



there for a few minutes, then crawled out and stood scratching his head. As soon as he crawled out, Twistum dived under, and when he crawled out the owner of the car dived under. For some time they took turns doing this—diving under, crawling out, and scratching their heads.

In the end Bendum discovered what the trouble was, and very soon the engine was humming away merrily. The delighted owner shook the hands of Bendum and Twistum.

"Thanks," he said. "I'd have spent the whole day taking a sun-bath if you hadn't happened along. Where are you going? Climb in, I'll give you a lift."

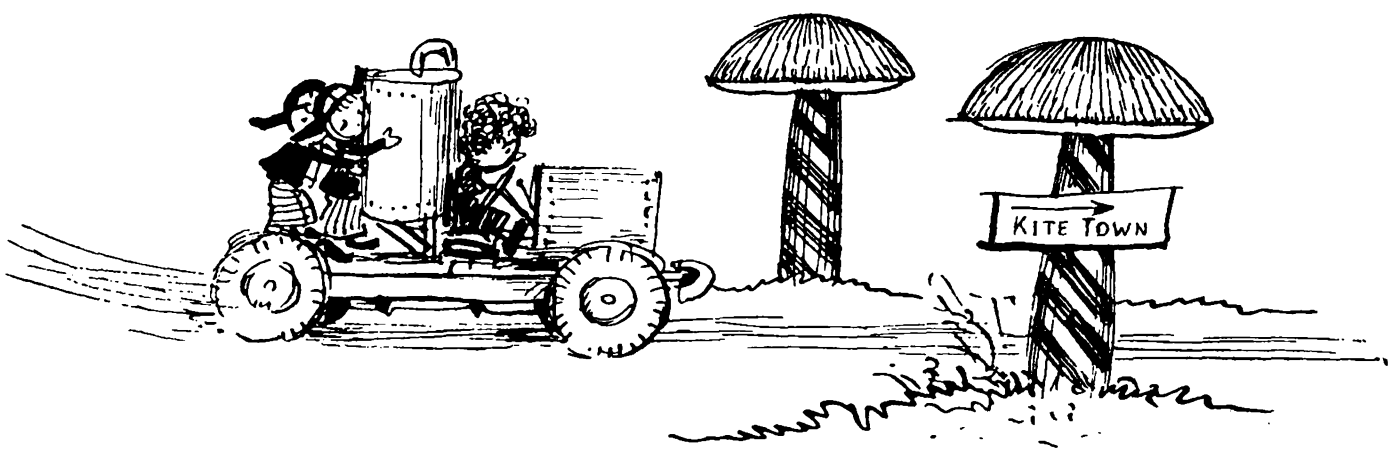
Bendum and Twistum told him what they had come for.

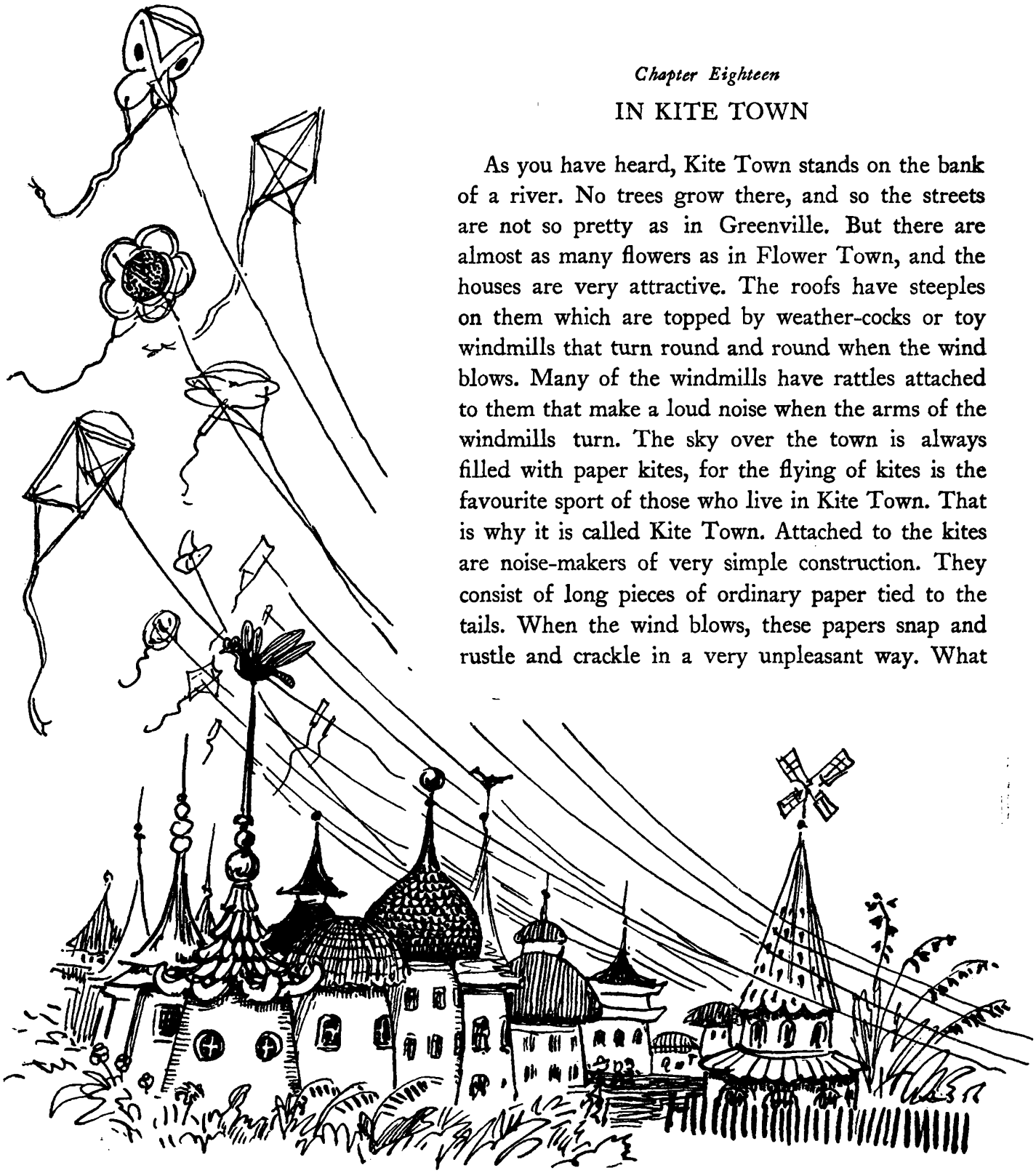
"I can lend you a monkey-wrench, hammer, and pliers, but I haven't got a soldering-iron," said the owner of the car.

"Don't you suppose we could find one in Kite Town?"

"Of course, you could. Taps, our plumber, is sure to have one. We'll go and ask him."

The three climbed into the car, and a few minutes later they were driving down the main street of Kite Town.

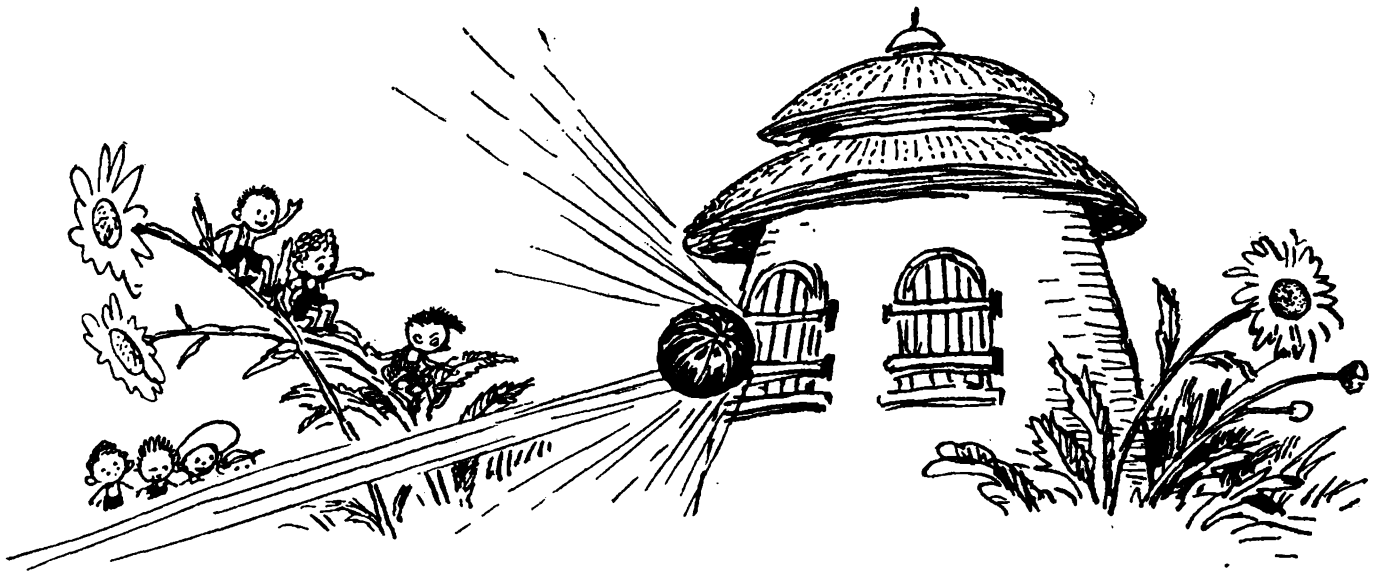




Chapter Eighteen

IN KITE TOWN

As you have heard, Kite Town stands on the bank of a river. No trees grow there, and so the streets are not so pretty as in Greenville. But there are almost as many flowers as in Flower Town, and the houses are very attractive. The roofs have steeples on them which are topped by weather-cocks or toy windmills that turn round and round when the wind blows. Many of the windmills have rattles attached to them that make a loud noise when the arms of the windmills turn. The sky over the town is always filled with paper kites, for the flying of kites is the favourite sport of those who live in Kite Town. That is why it is called Kite Town. Attached to the kites are noise-makers of very simple construction. They consist of long pieces of ordinary paper tied to the tails. When the wind blows, these papers snap and rustle and crackle in a very unpleasant way. What



with the rattles on the windmills and the papers on the kites, the town is very noisy.

The windows of all the houses are supplied with lattice-work shutters. These shutters are closed whenever the boys play football in the streets. Football is another one of their favourite sports, and these improved lattice-work windows have the advantage of letting in light without letting in footballs. For some strange reason footballs always fly towards windows instead of where they ought to fly.

When the car reached the end of the main street, it turned into a side-street and stopped in front of a wooden gateway. The top of the gateway was decorated with a glass ball which gave a lovely upside-down reflection of all the houses and fences, as well as of the car that had just stopped in front of it.

The owner of the car (who, by the way, was named Pretzel) got out and went up to the gate. On pressing a little button in the wall the gate opened noiselessly.

"Come in and meet Taps," said Pretzel to Bendum and Twistum. "I think you'll find him interesting."

The three friends entered the courtyard and walked over to the house which stood to the left of the gate. When they had climbed a few stone

steps, Pretzel pressed another button. The door of the house opened as noiselessly as the gate had, and our friends found themselves inside an odd room. There was not a thing in it—not a stick of furniture but a hammock hanging against the far wall. Inside the hammock lay a boy-Mite in a pair of blue overalls with his hands in his pockets and his legs crossed.

"Still sleeping, Taps?" said Pretzel. "High time to get up."

"I'm not sleeping. I'm thinking," said Taps, looking round at his visitors.

"Meet my friends Bendum and Twistum. They're tinkers, and they need a soldering-iron."

"Glad to meet you. Sit down," said Taps.

This was rather a surprising thing to hear him say, for there was nothing to sit on. At that moment Taps pushed a button in the wall and instantly three folding seats dropped out of the opposite wall.

Bendum and Twistum sat down.

"Have you noticed I do everything with buttons?" asked Taps. "One button opens the door, another lets down seats, and if you would like a table—here. . . ."

And he pressed another button, A table-top dropped down, almost hitting Bendum on the head.

"Very convenient, don't you think?" said Taps.

"Marvellous," said Bendum, glancing cautiously about to see that nothing else was about to fall on him.

"Everything mechanized," boasted Taps.

"The only drawback is that all the seats are against the wall," said Pretzel.

"Quite right," said the inventor. "I've been racking my brains to think of a way to move the chairs about."

"Wouldn't using ordinary chairs be the best way?" suggested Twistum.

"That's it! A brilliant idea!" exclaimed Taps happily. "I must invent

some plain, ordinary chairs. The most brilliant ideas are always the most simple. I can see that you, too, are interested in mechanics, aren't you?"

"Yes, we both are," said Twistum.

"So you're in need of a soldering-iron, are you?"

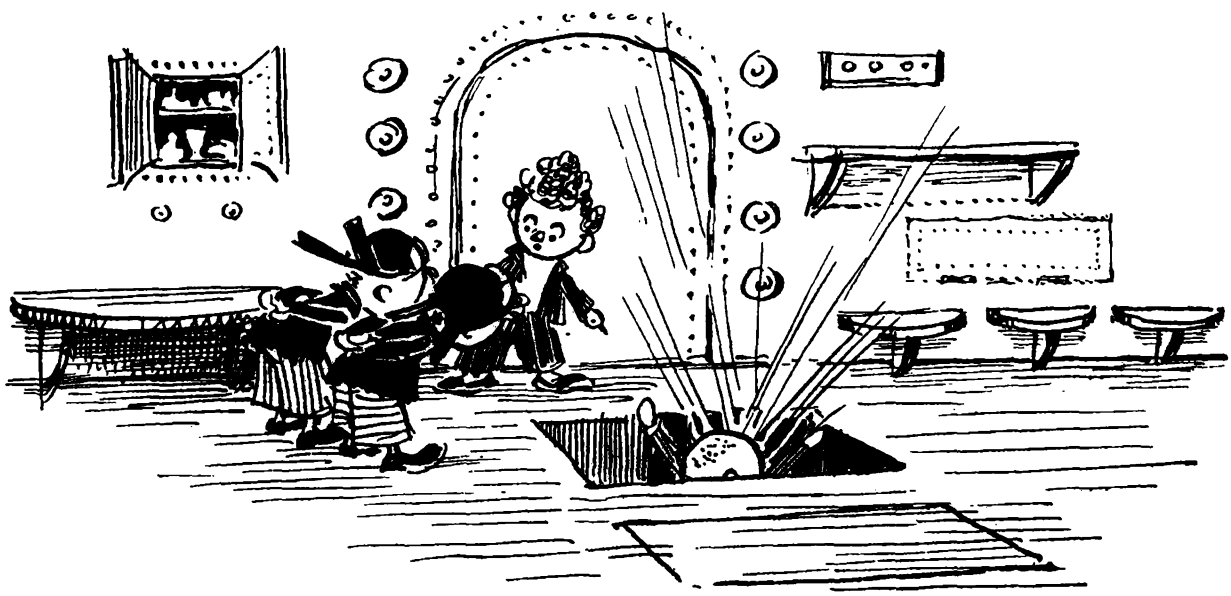
Taps pushed another button, and to everyone's astonishment the hammock began to sink slowly. Down, down it went until Taps was lying on the floor.

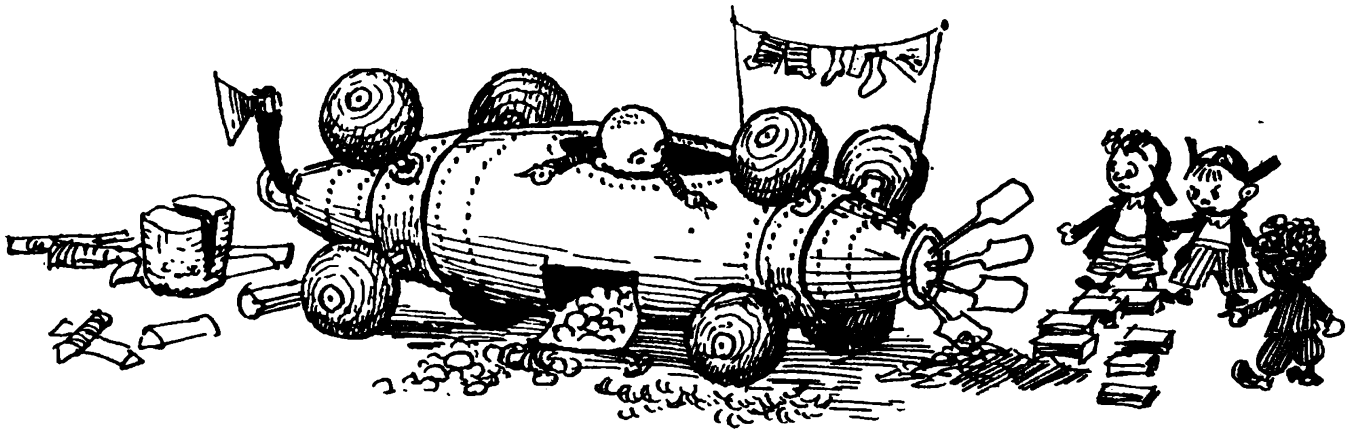
"When you get out of an ordinary hammock, you're always in danger of catching your foot in it and falling on your nose," explained Taps as he got up. "My mechanized hammock removes all danger of that. You are gently let down on the floor, from which you get up on your own two feet. In just the same way, when you wish to get into the hammock you first lie down on the floor, then push the button, which causes the hammock to rise to the desired height."

As he talked, Taps walked up and down, pushing buttons that let down tables, chairs and shelves, and opened closets and cupboards. The last button he pushed opened a trap-door in the floor that dropped him down into the cellar. A minute later his voice was heard calling from out in the courtyard:

"Come here, friends!"

The three went out.





"This is my garage," he said as he led Bendum and Twistum towards a stone building with a wide metal door.

He pushed a button and the door rose like a stage curtain. Inside the garage they saw a queer car with wheels all over it.

"That's my 8-wheeled steam-car with pistachio cooling," he explained. "It has four upper wheels and four lower wheels. Ordinarily it runs on the lower wheels. The upper ones are just in case it turns over. All eight wheels are attached at an angle so that the car can run not only right-side-up and up-side-down, but on each of its two sides as well. This reduces the danger of accidents."

Taps got in the car and demonstrated how it ran right-side-up and up-side-down and on both sides.

"Instead of the usual tank," he went on when the demonstration was over, "it has a boiler in which the soda-water is heated. The steam from this soda-water increases the pressure on the pistons, making the wheels go round faster than in ordinary cars. Behind this boiler is a freezer for making the pistachio ice-cream used for cooling the cylinders. The melted ice-cream is piped into a tank as oil for the engine. The car has four speeds: first, second, third, and fourth, besides which it can run sidewise or in reverse. In the back of the car there is a machine for washing clothes. The laundry can be done while the car is running at any of the four speeds. When it is standing still it can chop wood, mix clay, make bricks, and peel potatoes."

When the friends had gazed their fill they went into Taps' workshop, which was littered with everything under the sun: old bicycles, broken

tricycles, parts of scooters, wagons, tops, and other things. For a long time Taps searched for the soldering-iron without finding it. Suddenly he clapped his hand to his head and exclaimed:

"Goodness gracious, what a dunce I am! I left my soldering-iron at Slick's. You'll have to go there for it."

"That's nothing. I'll run them over in the car," said Pretzel.

"Who's Slick?" asked Bendum when the three friends had taken leave of Taps and were going through the gate.

"An author," said Pretzel.

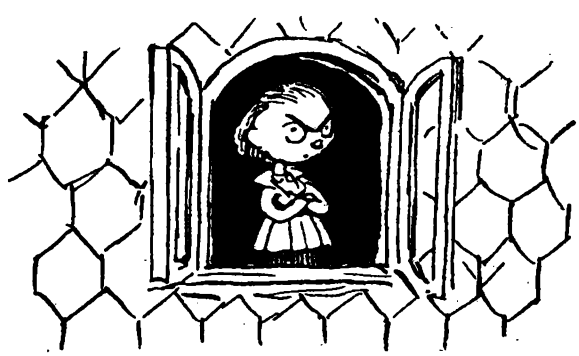
"Not really!" exclaimed Twistum. "What luck! I've always wanted to meet a live author."

"Here's your chance. He really is an interesting chap," said Pretzel as he climbed into the car.

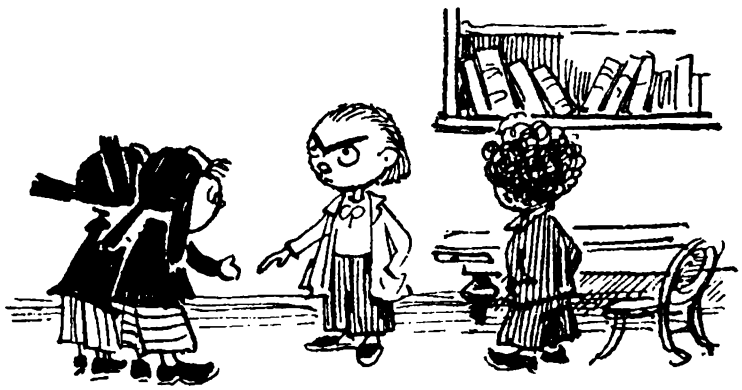
Chapter Nineteen

A VISIT TO A LIVE AUTHOR

Slick was standing at the open window of his study with his arms crossed, gazing out into the distance. His long hair was slicked back and his thick black eyebrows met over his nose, lending his face an expression of deep concentration. He did not so much as stir when our three friends came into the room. Pretzel greeted him in a loud voice and introduced Bendum and Twistum, explaining that they had come for the soldering-iron, but still Slick kept staring out of the window with the look of one who had a very quick and clever thought scampering about inside his head and he was doing his best to catch it by the tail. Pretzel shrugged his shoulders and looked at Bendum and Twistum as if to say: "What did I tell you?"



In the end Slick shook himself as if he had just awakened, and turned round.



"How do you do," he said in a soft drawl. "I beg your pardon, my friends. I was ... er ... withdrawn, so to say—carried away by my imagination into higher realms.... Slick," he said by way of introduction, holding out his hand to Bendum.

Bendum took his hand, which felt very much like a fish-cake, and repeated his own name.

"Slick," said the writer again as he held out his hand to Twistum.

"Twistum," said the latter, shaking the fish-cake.

"Slick," said the writer a third time as he held out his hand to Pretzel.

"But you and I know each other," said Pretzel.

"Ah, so it's Pretzel," said Slick. "Glad to see you. Very glad indeed. Do sit down, friends."

They all sat down.

"So you've met that Taps of ours, have you?" asked Slick, showing by this question that whatever the realms to which he had been carried away, he had heard Pretzel's words. "I suppose he's shown you his folding chairs and tables?" he added with a chuckle.

Bendum nodded his head. A mocking smile lingered in the corners of Slick's mouth and he rubbed his knees as if it gave him pleasure.

"A queer lot, those inventor fellows," he said. "Now what do you suppose anybody could want with all those folding tables and chairs, those secret cupboards and falling hammocks? I prefer sitting on an ordinary chair that doesn't leap up the minute you get off it, and

sleeping in a bed that doesn't go up and down the minute you get into it. Who could make me sleep in such a bed? Who could make me if I did not want to? Who could make me if I had no desire to?"

"Nobody could," said Pretzel. "It's just that Taps is an inventor, and so he's always trying to think of improvements. He isn't always successful, but some of his inventions are very useful. He's a clever workman."

"I don't say he isn't," put in Slick. "On the contrary, I say he *is*. He has made me an excellent chatterbox, for instance."

"A chatterbox?"

"A talking machine. Here, look."

And Slick led his visitors over to a table on which stood a small apparatus.

"That little box, or bag, or whatever you wish to call it, has an opening in one side. If you say a few words into the opening and then push this button, the chatterbox will repeat everything you have said. Try it," said Slick to Bendum.

Bendum leaned down and said into the little box:

"Bendum, Bendum, Twistum, Twistum."

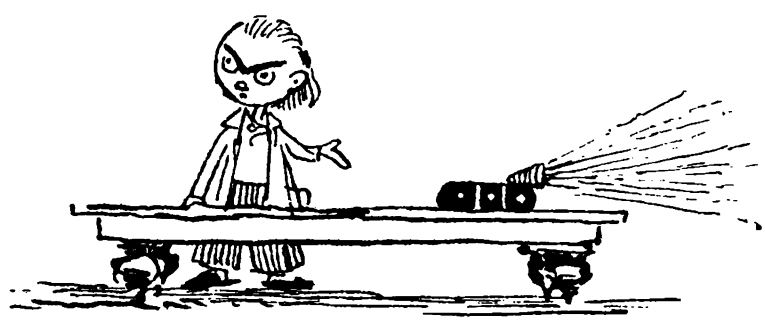
"And Pretzel," added Pretzel.

Slick pressed a button and the machine repeated in a husky voice:

"Bendum, Bendum, Twistum, Twistum. And Pretzel."

"What do you want a talking machine for?" asked Twistum.

"Why, a writer is practically helpless without a machine of this sort,"



said Slick. "I put it in people's houses, and it records everything they say. All I have to do is copy down the words and there you are—a short story or even a novel, all ready for print."

"How very simple it is!" said Twistum. "And some people say a writer has to have a plot first!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Slick contemptuously. "That's what they say in the books, but just you try to think of a plot when they've all been thought of. There's not a plot that comes into your head that hasn't been in somebody else's first. No, this is the modern method—taking your material straight from nature—in the raw, so to speak. And who knows but that in so doing, you may hit on something no writer has ever thought of before.

"But not everybody may be willing to have you put your chatterbox in his house," said Bendum.

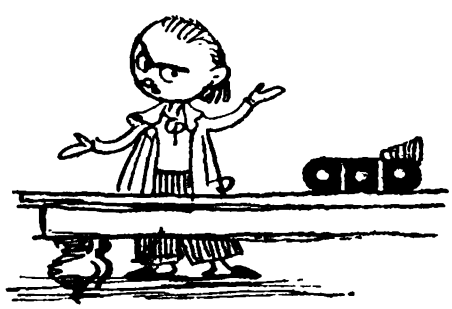
"I fool them," said Slick. "As you see, it looks like an ordinary little bag. I take it with me when I go to visit my friends, and when I go home I 'accidentally' leave it under a table or chair. Later I have the pleasure of hearing everything my friends have said."

"And what do they say?" asked Twistum. "It must be awfully interesting."

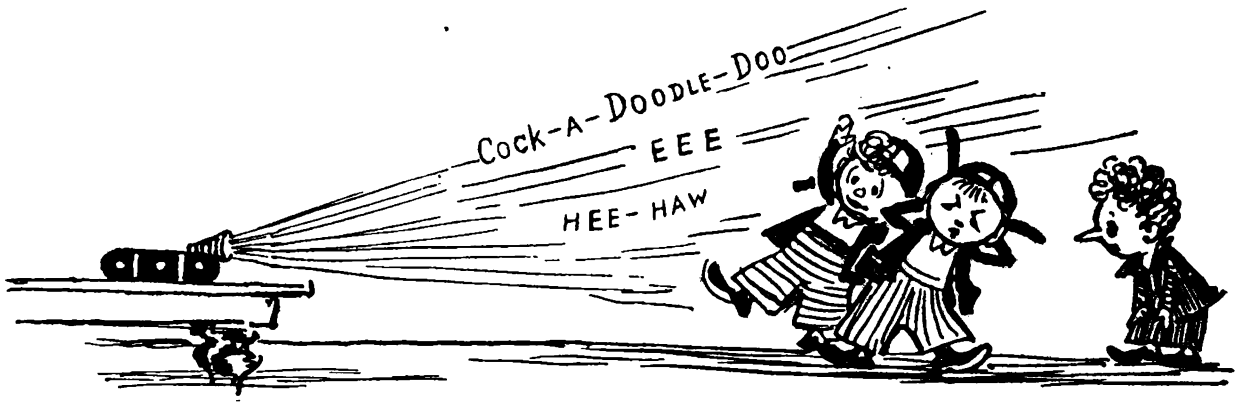
"It is. I myself had no idea it would be so interesting. It turns out they don't say anything at all. They roar with laughter for no apparent reason, they crow like cocks, they bark like dogs, they grunt and moo and mew, but they don't say anything at all."

"How strange!" said Bendum.

"Isn't it?" said Slick. "As long as I am with them they talk like normal Mites, but the minute I leave they begin to make these remarkable noises. Here, listen to last night's recording."



Slick twisted a disk inside the apparatus and pushed a button. First the visitors heard a scraping noise and a bang as of a door shutting. This was followed by a moment's silence ending in a roar



of laughter. Somebody said. "Under the table." There was a scraping of feet. Another burst of laughter. Barking, crowing, mooing. The bleating of a sheep. Somebody said: "Here, I'll bray like an ass: hee-haw! hee-haw! hee-haw!" The neighing of a horse. More laughter.

"See? . . . or rather, hear?" said Slick with a lift of his shoulders.

"Rather hard to make a novel out of that," said Bendum.

"There's no mystery here," said Pretzel to Slick. "Everybody in town knows about your machine by this time, and so as soon as you go home they shout all sorts of nonsense into it."

"But why should they?"

"You wanted to pull one over on them, and they pulled one over on you instead. Their little joke."

Slick frowned.

"So that's what's happening! Well, I'll get the better of them yet. I'll put my chatterbox under their windows. That little bag will prove its worth yet. But look at this—what do you think *this* is?"—and he pointed to a bulky package that looked like a folded tent, or a large-sized umbrella.

"Is it an umbrella?" asked Twistum.

"Not at all. It's a portable chair and table for authors," said Slick. "Let's say an author wants to write a description of a wood. He goes to the wood, opens up his table, sits down in a comfortable chair, and writes a description of everything he sees. Here, try the chair," he said to Twistum.

Slick pushed a button in what seemed to be the handle of the umbrella, and instantly it turned into a small table and chair. Twistum had to tie himself into knots to get into the chair.

"Now that you are comfortable you are sure to get an inspiration," said Slick. "You'll agree that it is a thousand times more comfortable to write while sitting in a chair than while sitting on the grass or the bare earth."

Twistum felt neither comfortable nor inspired. He did feel a cramp in his leg and so decided to change the subject as quickly as possible.

"What books have you written?" he asked as he wrenched himself out of the chair.

"I haven't written any yet," said Slick. "Being an author is not as simple as you might think. Before I could become an author I had to supply myself with a number of things which were hard to get. First of all I had to wait until my folding table and chair were ready. That took years. Then I had to wait for the chatterbox. You yourselves know how workmen like to drag things out. Taps especially. Why, it took him two and a half years just to think of how he would make the chatterbox. None of his concern that I was kept waiting! As if he could appreciate the pangs of creative effort! I realize that the chatterbox is a very complicated apparatus, but I see no reason why he should have made it even more complicated."

"Why, did he?" asked Bendum.

"He did indeed. Instead of making a simple chatterbox, he made one combined with a vacuum cleaner. What in the world do I want with a vacuum cleaner? That cost me another year and a half. But that's over and done with," said Slick with a wave of his hand. "I have the chatterbox now, and there remain only a few more trifles to collect before I shall begin to write."

"Wouldn't it be a fine thing if somebody invented a thinking machine for writers?" said Twistum.

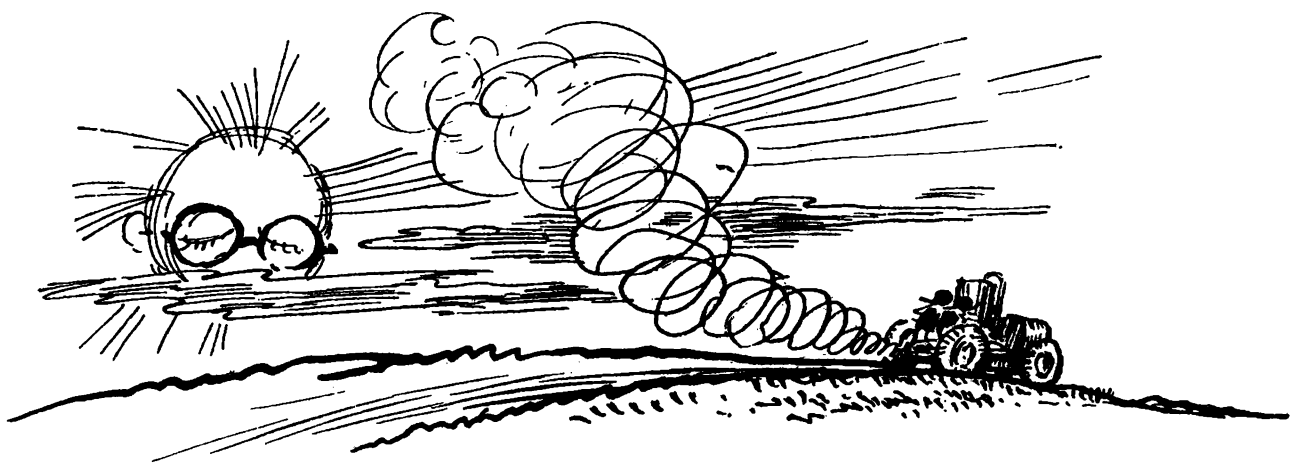
"A very fine thing," agreed Slick.

By this time the sun had begun to set and the visitors thought it was time for them to leave. They said good-bye, took the soldering-iron, and went out.

"We must hurry if we want to get to Greenville before dark," said Bendum.

"Have no fear, I'll get you there in a jiffy," said Pretzel. "But I think we had better have something to eat first."

And he took them home with him for dinner.



Chapter Twenty

BLOBS AT WORK

While Bendum and Twistum were in Kite Town, important events were taking place in Greenville. The first thing that happened was that Blobs painted a portrait of Snowdrop. It took him almost two hours to do it, but the time was well spent. The picture was the very image of Snowdrop. Some of the girl-Mites said it was even better than Snowdrop, but that wasn't true. It would have been hard to improve on Snowdrop. Perhaps Blobs succeeded in making the beauty of her features more striking and expressive, but that, surely, is the purpose of all true art.

The portrait was hung on the wall of the room downstairs where all might see it. And all who did see it straightaway demanded that Blobs do portraits of them. But Snowdrop would not let anyone reach Blobs in the room upstairs where he was busy painting a portrait of Cornflower.

Dunno, who kept dancing about Blobs and giving him all sorts of unnecessary advice to show how much he knew about painting, heard a great noise downstairs.

"What's all this noise? What's all this noise?" he shouted as he ran down the stairs. "Get out of here, all of you!"

The poor girls were so anxious to reach the artist that they did not even take offence at Dunno's rudeness. On the contrary, they swarmed round him and called him "dear, good Dunno," and begged him not to send them away.

"Then form a queue," shouted Dunno, shoving the girls roughly against the wall. "A queue, I said, or I'll shoo you all away!"

"Ugh, what a beast you are!" said Snowdrop. "That's no way to talk. You make me quite blush for you."

"Go ahead and blush," said Dunno.

Just then another girl-Mite came into the room, and in the general disorder she managed to reach the stairway before she was seen. Dunno made a dash for her and was about to seize her by the arm when she stopped, and, turning a withering look on him, shook her finger in his face.

"Don't dare to touch me!" she said. "I don't have to queue up. I'm a poetess."

This was so unexpected that Dunno just stood there gaping while the poetess went calmly up the stairs.

"Who is she?" asked Dunno, pointing after her.

"A poetess. She writes poetry," said the girls.

"What of it?" drawled Dunno. "We've got a poet where I come from, too. He's my pupil. I taught him how to write poetry, and now he does it himself."

"And so you're a poet, too?" gasped the girl-Mites.

"I am."

"Think of that! An artist and a poet!"

"And a musician," added Dunno proudly.

"Read one of your poems to us," they asked.

"Later," said Dunno with the air of one who had too many matters of more importance to think of.

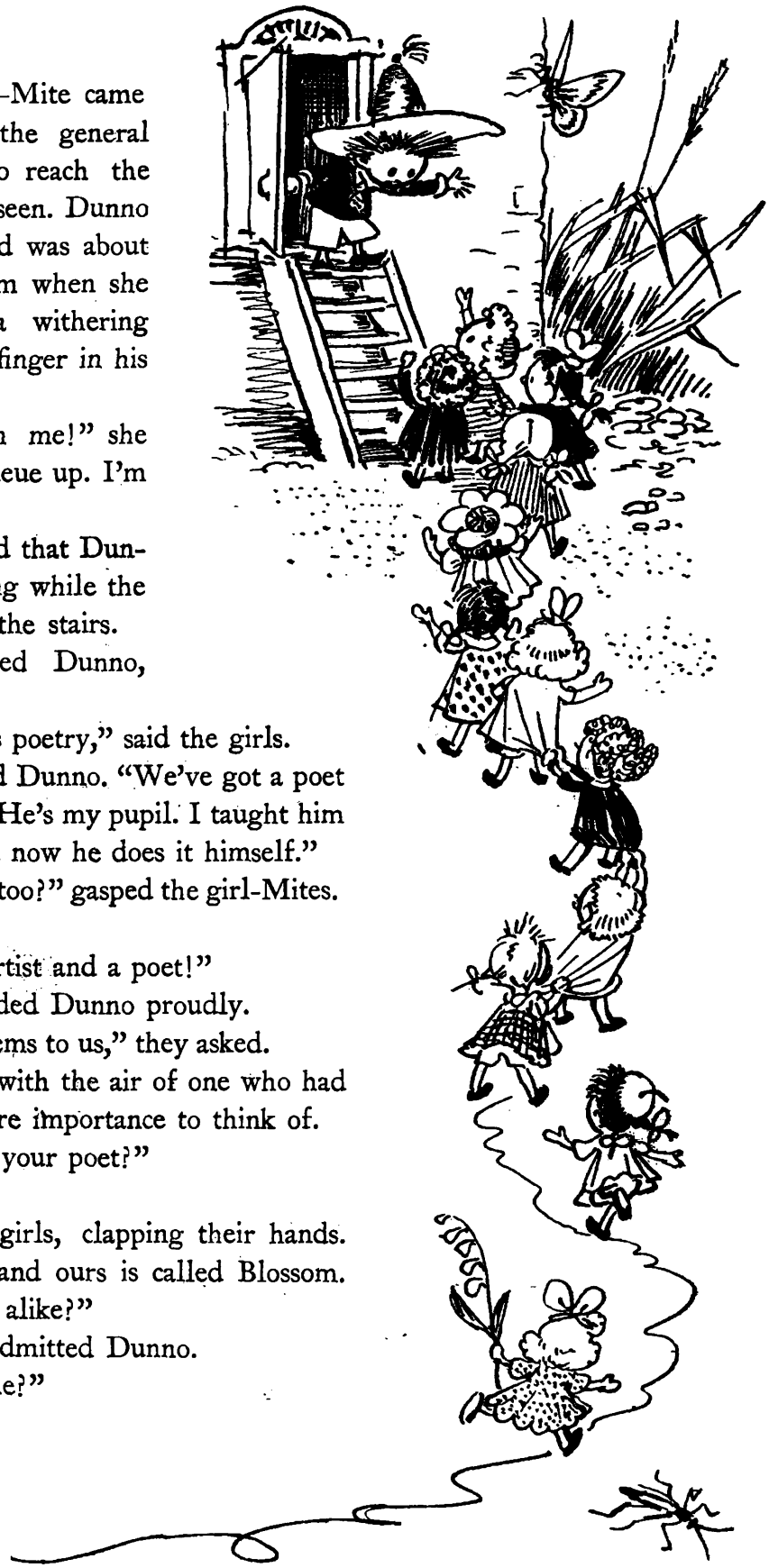
"What's the name of your poet?"

"Posey."

"Posey?" cried the girls, clapping their hands. "Yours is called Posey and ours is called Blossom. Don't you find they are alike?"

"They are a little," admitted Dunno.

"Do you like her name?"



"It's not bad."

"You should hear her poems!" cried the girls. "They're too sweet for anything! Go upstairs and she'll recite them to you. Then tell us what you think of them."

"I s'pose I may as well," said Dunno.

When he entered the upstairs room Blobs was putting the finishing touches to Cornflower's portrait and Blossom was sitting beside Trills on the sofa, discussing music with him. Dunno clasped his hands behind his back and began pacing the floor, casting sidelong glances at the poetess from time to time.

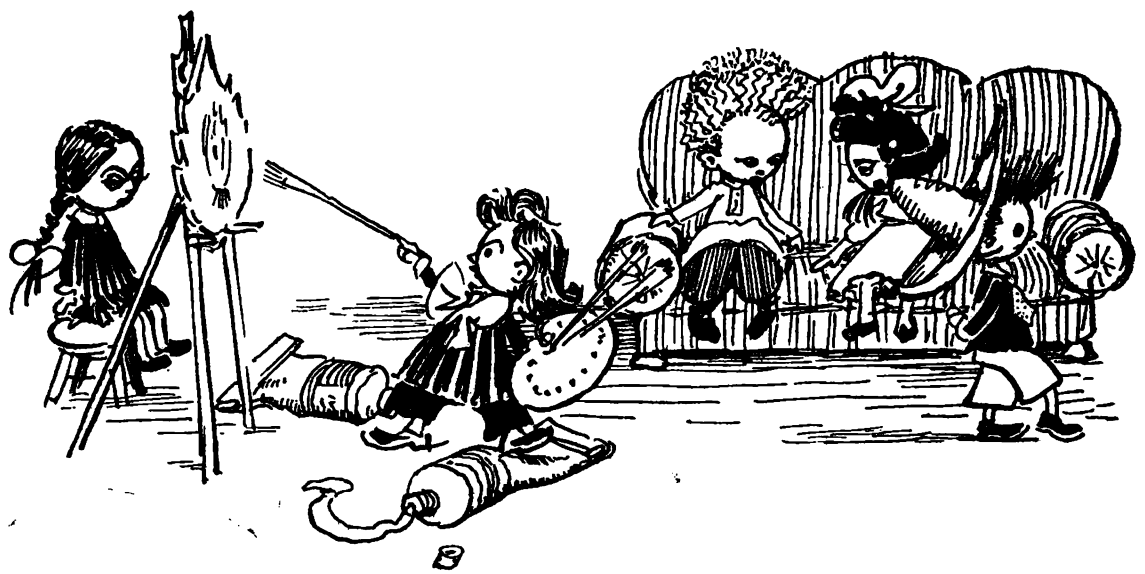
"Why do you keep going back and forth like a pendulum?" said Blossom. "Please sit down. You make me dizzy."

"Mind your own business or I'll tell Blobs not to paint your portrait," said Dunno.

"Why, can he give orders to you?" Blossom asked Blobs in astonishment.

"He can. He can do anything," said Blobs, who was so busy painting he did not hear what Dunno had said.

"See?" said Dunno. "Everybody's got to take orders from me because I'm the chief."



Seeing how important he was, Blossom decided to make up to him.

"Was it you who made the balloon?" she said.

"Who else?" said Dunno.

"Some day I'll write a poem about you."

"I don't want any of your poems," snorted Dunno.

"Don't say that," murmured Blossom. "You don't know what pretty poems I write. Would you like me to recite one of them to you?"

"Go ahead if you want to," said Dunno indifferently.

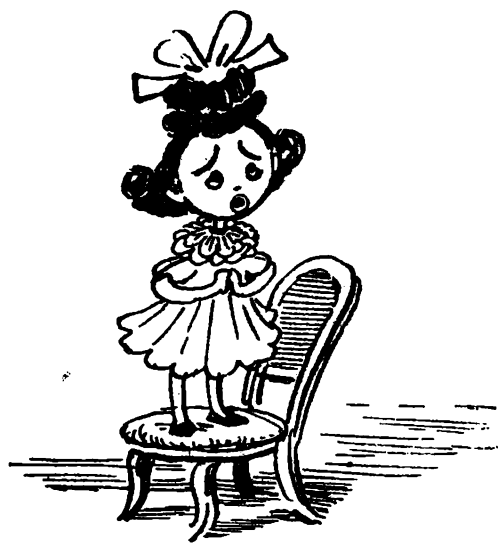
"I'll recite one of my latest. It's about a frog:

I caught a froggy by the toe,
Tra-la-la, and let him go.
I'm very fond of frogs and mice,
Tra-la-la, they're very nice.
Then I caught a bumble-bee,
I didn't see his sting, you see.
The sting saw me, boo-hoo! boo-hoo!
And stung my finger through and through.
I've had enough of frogs and bees,
Of playing tricks and climbing trees,
Such things won't cultivate my head;
I ought to read a book instead."

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" exclaimed Blobs and even clapped his hands.

"A very nice poem," said Trills. "It not only treats of frogs, but encourages the young to read books. Very instructive."

"Here's another one," said the poetess. This time it was about a firefly instead of a frog and ended with the words. "I ought to go and make my bed" instead of "I ought to read a book instead." The next one was about a gnat and ended: "I ought to see the chickens fed," and the last one ended with: "I ought to go and paint the poultry shed."



By that time Blobs had finished Cornflower's portrait. Everyone was delighted with it.

"Charming!" they said. "Delightful! A masterpiece!"

"Couldn't you paint me in a blue dress like that?" said Blossom to Blobs.

"But your dress is green," said Blobs.

"What difference does that make? You can paint it blue, even if it is green. Do, that's a dear, I'd have put on a blue dress if I'd known Cornflower's picture would turn out so well in blue."

"I suppose I can," said Blobs.

"And make my eyes blue, too."

"Your eyes? But they're brown," said Blobs.

"Does that matter so much? If you can make a green dress blue, why can't you make brown eyes blue, too? Come, that's a dear," she coaxed.

"There's a big difference between eyes and dresses," said Blobs. "You can change your dress, but you can't possibly change your eyes."

"I see. Well, then, paint them brown if you must, but make them as big as possible."

"They're big enough as it is."

"Just the least bit bigger. Do, please. And give me long, long lashes."

"Very well."

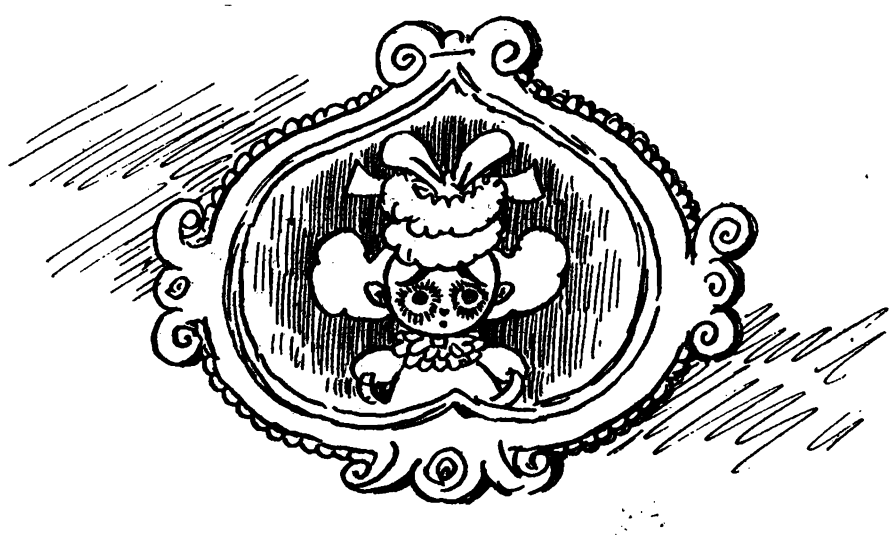
"And golden hair. My hair's almost golden as it is, isn't it?"

"Almost," said Blobs.

He began to paint the poetess. Every minute or so she would jump up to look at the picture and exclaim:

"Make the eyes bigger—bigger still, bigger still!" "Make the lashes longer—longer still, longer still." "Make the mouth smaller—smaller still, smaller still!"

When finished, the portrait had enormous eyes, a mouth no bigger than the head of a pin, and hair that might have been made of pure gold. It bore almost no resemblance to Blossom, but she was pleased with it and said she could not wish for anything better.



Chapter Twenty-One

THE RETURN OF BENDUM AND TWISTUM

Blossom went downstairs clasping her portrait lovingly to her breast. The minute she appeared she was surrounded by her friends. They all said the portrait was much prettier than Snowdrop's and Cornflower's, though less of a likeness.

"Sillies!" said Blossom. "It's more important that a portrait be pretty than that it be a likeness!"

"Of course it is," they all agreed.

Just then Birdie and Kitty came running into the room all out of breath.

"Oh dear!" they gasped. "Oh dear! We're going to faint!"

"Why, what's happened?" asked their frightened friends.

"Today we went to the hospital...." began Birdie.

"... to take home whoever was to be let out...." went on Kitty.

"... and Honeysuckle said they had left already...." put in Birdie.

"... and we begged her to let out some others," said Kitty, speaking so fast that Birdie couldn't interrupt her, "and Honeysuckle let us have P'raps and Swifty and we led them down the street and they ran away from us and climbed a tree."

"They're afraid we're going to teach them how to behave," laughed Birdie.

"As if we had nothing better to do!" said Kitty scornfully.

"Where are they now?"

"They're still up the tree and they're sure to begin picking the apples."

"Let's go and see," suggested Snowdrop.

Sure enough, there were P'raps and Swifty perched on the limb of an apple-tree doing their best to pick one of the apples. They were pulling it and twisting it, trying to break it off the stem.

All of a sudden they caught sight of the girls who had stopped at a safe distance and were watching them. This made them redouble their efforts to pick the apple. P'raps even tried to bite through the stem with his teeth.

"They haven't been able to pick a single apple!" they heard somebody say.

P'raps and Swifty looked down to see Cornflower's blue eyes laughing up at them.

"Hold your tongue, blue eyes!" cried P'raps. "P'raps you think it's easy to pick apples?"

"P'raps you'd find it easier with a saw?"

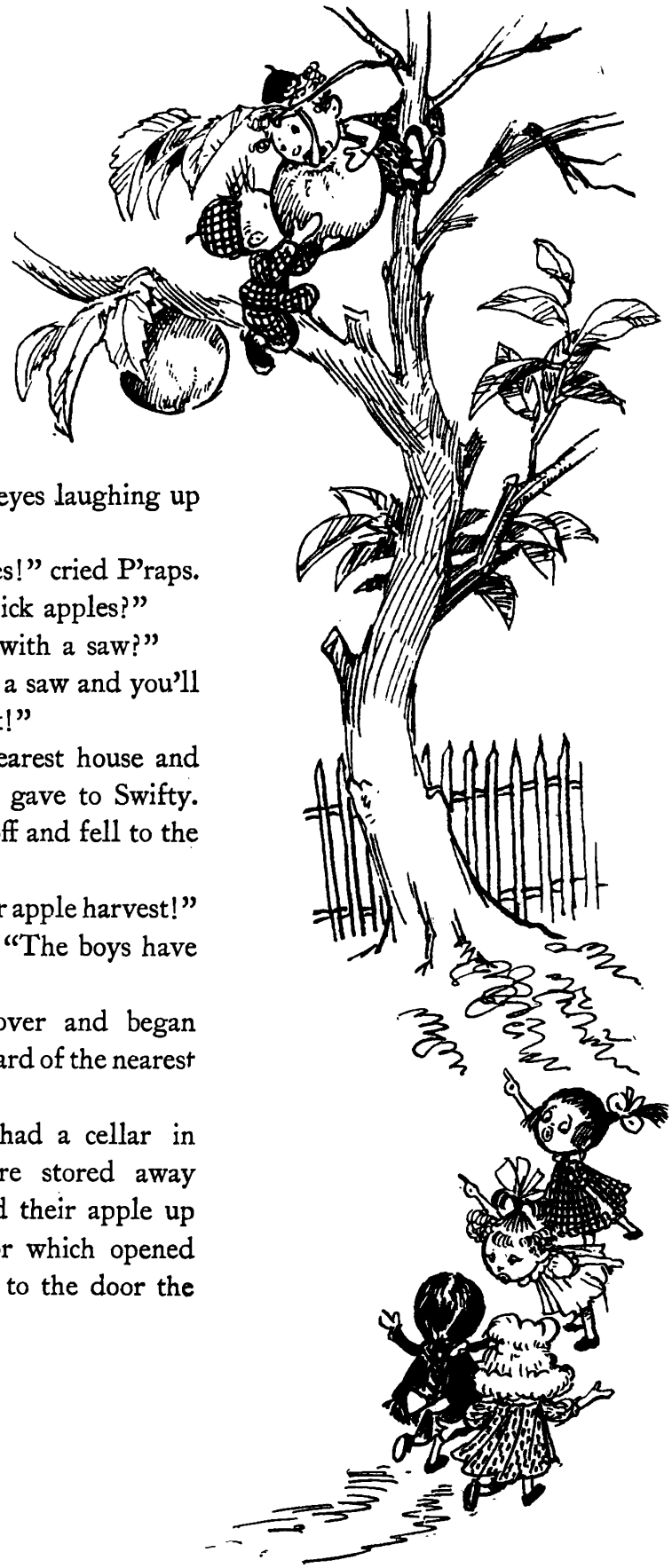
"Wouldn't we just! Give us a saw and you'll see how many apples we'll pick!"

Cornflower ran off to the nearest house and came back with a saw that she gave to Swifty. In a trice the apple was sawed off and fell to the ground.

"Hurrah! We'll gather in our apple harvest!" said Cornflower to her friends. "The boys have come to help us!"

A few of her friends ran over and began rolling the apple into the courtyard of the nearest house.

Every house in Greenville had a cellar in which fruit and vegetables were stored away for the winter. The girls rolled their apple up a broad walk leading to a door which opened into the cellar. When they got to the door the



apple rolled in of itself. As the girls ran back for more, they met other girls rolling up other apples.

The work hummed. Flitty came running up with another saw in her hand. She had pulled a pair of volley-ball knickers over her skirt, and she climbed nimbly up the tree to join the boy-Mites.

"Hey, you! Let's have that saw!" called out P'raps. "You don't know how to handle it!"

"I suppose *you* do!" she called back.

She straddled a limb and set about sawing off an apple while P'raps watched her enviously.

"Let's work together," he said a little later. "First you saw and I'll rest, then I'll saw and you rest."

"I don't mind," agreed Flitty.

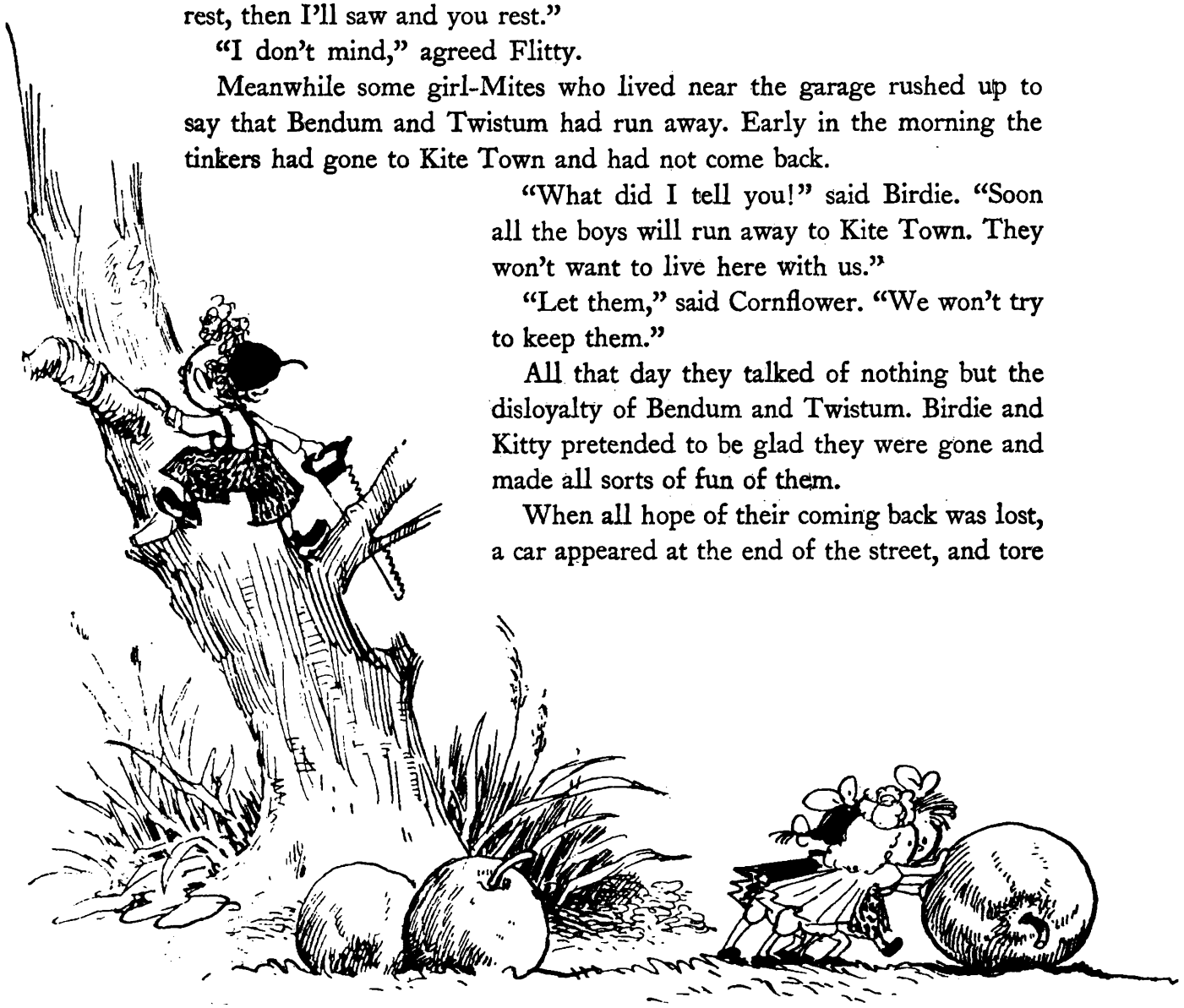
Meanwhile some girl-Mites who lived near the garage rushed up to say that Bendum and Twistum had run away. Early in the morning the tinkers had gone to Kite Town and had not come back.

"What did I tell you!" said Birdie. "Soon all the boys will run away to Kite Town. They won't want to live here with us."

"Let them," said Cornflower. "We won't try to keep them."

All that day they talked of nothing but the disloyalty of Bendum and Twistum. Birdie and Kitty pretended to be glad they were gone and made all sorts of fun of them.

When all hope of their coming back was lost, a car appeared at the end of the street, and tore



by hissing and burring. The girls dropped their work and ran after it. Birdie and Kitty were the first to run.

"Bendum and Twistum have come back!" they cried. "Bendum and Twistum have come back!" Suddenly they stopped dead. "Don't let's run after them," they said. "It'll look as if we're glad they've come."

When they reached the garage they saw that Pretzel had come, too.

"And who might *that* be?" asked Kitty indignantly. "Might it be that Pretzel who lives in Kite Town? Why has he come? We didn't invite him."

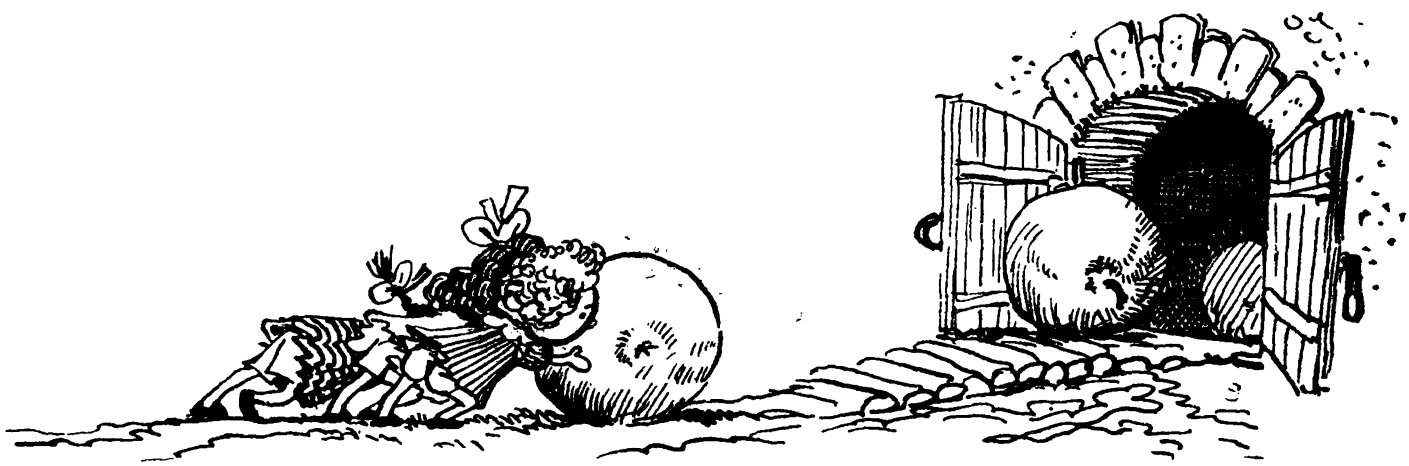
"Humph!" snorted Pretzel. "As if I had to wait to be invited!"

"Humph yourself," said Birdie. "We don't go to see you, and don't you come to see us."

"Why shouldn't you come to see us? We wouldn't drive you away," said Pretzel.

"You did once. You invited us to your New Year's party and when we came you threw snowballs at us."

"What of it? We just wanted to play with you. You ought to have thrown snowballs back at us."



"You ought to have known that girl-Mites don't like to touch snow with their hands."

"Well, we didn't," said Pretzel with a little shrug of his shoulders. "And we never thought you'd get mad and go round with a chip on your shoulder for the rest of your life."

"It's you who go round with a chip on your shoulder. Why did you have to send Nails to us? You must have known the trouble he'd make."

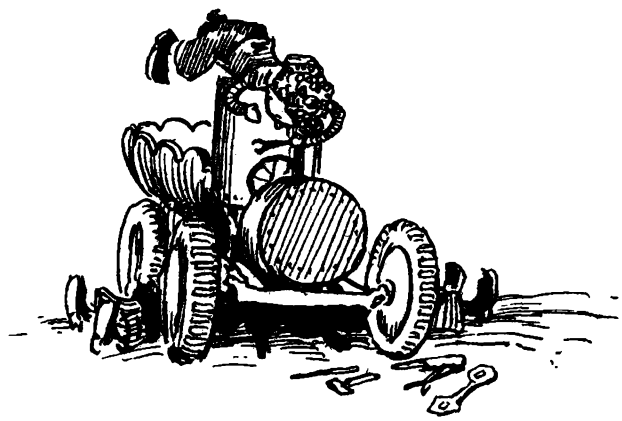
"We don't answer for Nails," said Pretzel. "He makes just as much trouble for us. We can't do anything with him. We didn't send him to you. He came here on his own business."

"Business?" gasped Kitty. "Do you call that business? Oh, no, we've had quite enough of you and your Nails. We won't have anything more to do with you. We don't need you any more, we have some boys of our own now."

"Very well, don't have anything to do with us! We don't give a hang. I just happened to drive Bendum and Twistum over in my car and now I'm going straight back."

Pretzel walked away in a huff. But he did not go straight back. He began to help Bendum and Twistum mend the other car. Most drivers are like that. When they see somebody mending a car, they just can't help joining in—tightening a bolt or a screw, or just offering advice.

The three of them worked until late at night, but even so they did not get the car going, so many were the repairs it needed.



Chapter Twenty-Two

THE ADVANTAGES OF MECHANIZATION

Next morning Cornflower went to the hospital and told Honeysuckle that the boys who had been let out were not fighting and making trouble, but were helping pick apples and behaving themselves very well indeed.

"I'm very glad," said Honeysuckle, "that you've found a means of keeping them busy. I beg you to put Prob'ly and Scatterbrain to work too. They're to be let out today."

"Couldn't you let some of the others out, too?" asked Cornflower. "It's too bad to keep them cooped up when they might be doing something useful."

"Yesterday I let you have P'raps and Swifty before their time was up," said Honeysuckle drily. "Isn't that enough for you?"

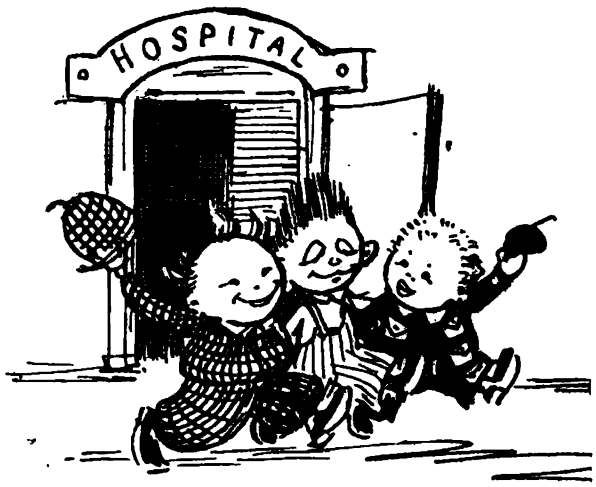
"No, it isn't."

"Well, then, I might let you have Mums. He's very meek and never pesters me with questions."

"And who else?"

Honeysuckle put on her spectacles and examined the list.

"I might let Roly-Poly and Treacly-Sweeter out. They, too, are very well-behaved. Although, when you come to think of it, Roly-Poly really ought to be kept in on account of his eating so many sweets. I haven't been able to break him of that bad habit. It wouldn't be so bad if he just ate them, but he stuffs them in all his pockets besides and even hides them under his pillow. Oh, well, perhaps the fresh air will take away his appetite. I ought to keep Treacly-Sweeter here too, on account of his drinking so much syrup and soda-water. But I suppose I'll let them both out—on account of their being so well-behaved."



Once more Honeysuckle examined the list.

"It's too soon to let Shot out," she said. "His ankle's still swollen. He's my only real patient, you know."

"What about Grumps?" said Cornflower.

"Never! I wouldn't let him out for anything!" cried Honeysuckle. "He's such a nasty chap! Always grumbling and complaining. He gets on anybody's nerves. Let him stay where he is for being such a grumbler. Of course, I'd be only too glad to get rid of him, and of that insufferable Pillman, too, who calls himself a doctor and is always trying to prove my methods wrong."

"Let them both out if they're such a nuisance," said Cornflower.

"Not for the world! Do you know what that horrid Pillman said to me today? He said I made people sick instead of well! How do you like that? You can be sure I'll keep him here just as long as I can. And Grumps too."

And so the only ones Cornflower succeeded in having let out along with Prob'ly and Scatterbrain were Mums, Roly-Poly, and Treacly-Sweeter; Grumps and Dr. Pillman were left behind, as was Shot. Shot said not a word, for his leg still hurt him, but Grumps and Dr. Pillman were ready to tear their hair in rage, and they said if they weren't let out by evening they'd run away.

Long before sun-up the next morning Bendum, Twistum, and Pretzel were up and at work on the car. They worked for hours before the engine at last gave a sputter and got going. When it was going smoothly they gave the car a trial run. They drove it round the house a few times, raising clouds of dust, then through the gate and down the street. Soon they came in sight of the Mites who were apple-picking. Swifty, Scatterbrain, P'raps and Prob'ly were up in an apple-tree; Trills, Mums and

Flitty were up in a pear-tree. Girl-Mites were rolling apples in all directions. Dunno was running about shouting orders at everybody.

"Five of you here, five over there," he cried. "Take this apple next. Back, confound you! Can't you see that that pear's about to fall? Hey, you, up there! Warn us when your pears are falling! Out of the way or I'll skin you alive!"

The work would have gone on just as well without all this shouting, but Dunno did not think so.

Treacly-Sweeter and Roly-Poly were pushing a pear that went in every direction but the one they wanted it to go in. As you know, a pear is not shaped like an apple. It is shaped so that if you push it, it goes round in a circle without getting anywhere. This particular pear had got bruised in falling. It was all mushy, and the more Roly-Poly and Treacly-Sweeter pushed it, the mushier it got. They were soon smeared all over with sticky juice, and they spent more time licking their fingers than pushing the pear.

"Why aren't you getting anywhere with that pear?" called out Dunno. "Maybe you think of making syrup out of it? I'll give you a taste of syrup!"

Bendum and Twistum stopped the car to watch the pickers.

"Hey, Dunno!" cried Bendum, "why don't you mechanize the work?"

"As if I didn't have trouble enough with all these apples without any mechanization!" said Dunno crossly. "Where am I to get mechanization?"

"Here's one car at your service," said Pretzel.

"Is that what you call mechanization—working with machines?"

"Certainly it is. We'll haul your apples and pears for you."

"That's an idea!" said Dunno. "Here, drive under this tree and we'll drop an apple right into the car."

"Wait, that won't do," said Bendum. "If you let the apples drop from the tree into the car, you'll bruise the apples and break the car."

"Do you expect us to carry down each apple?"

"Why carry them? Let them down on a rope."

"Good!" exclaimed Dunno. "Hey, bring me a rope!" he called out.

The rope was quickly brought. Dunno took it and fumbled with it a while, not knowing what to do with it. Suddenly he made a face as if a bright idea had struck him and handed the rope to Bendum.

"Well, get busy," he said.

Bendum threw one end of the rope over a limb of the apple-tree and told Swifty to tie it to the stem of an apple. He gave the other end to some girls who were standing near by and told them to hold on tight.

"Now saw through the stem," he called to Swifty.

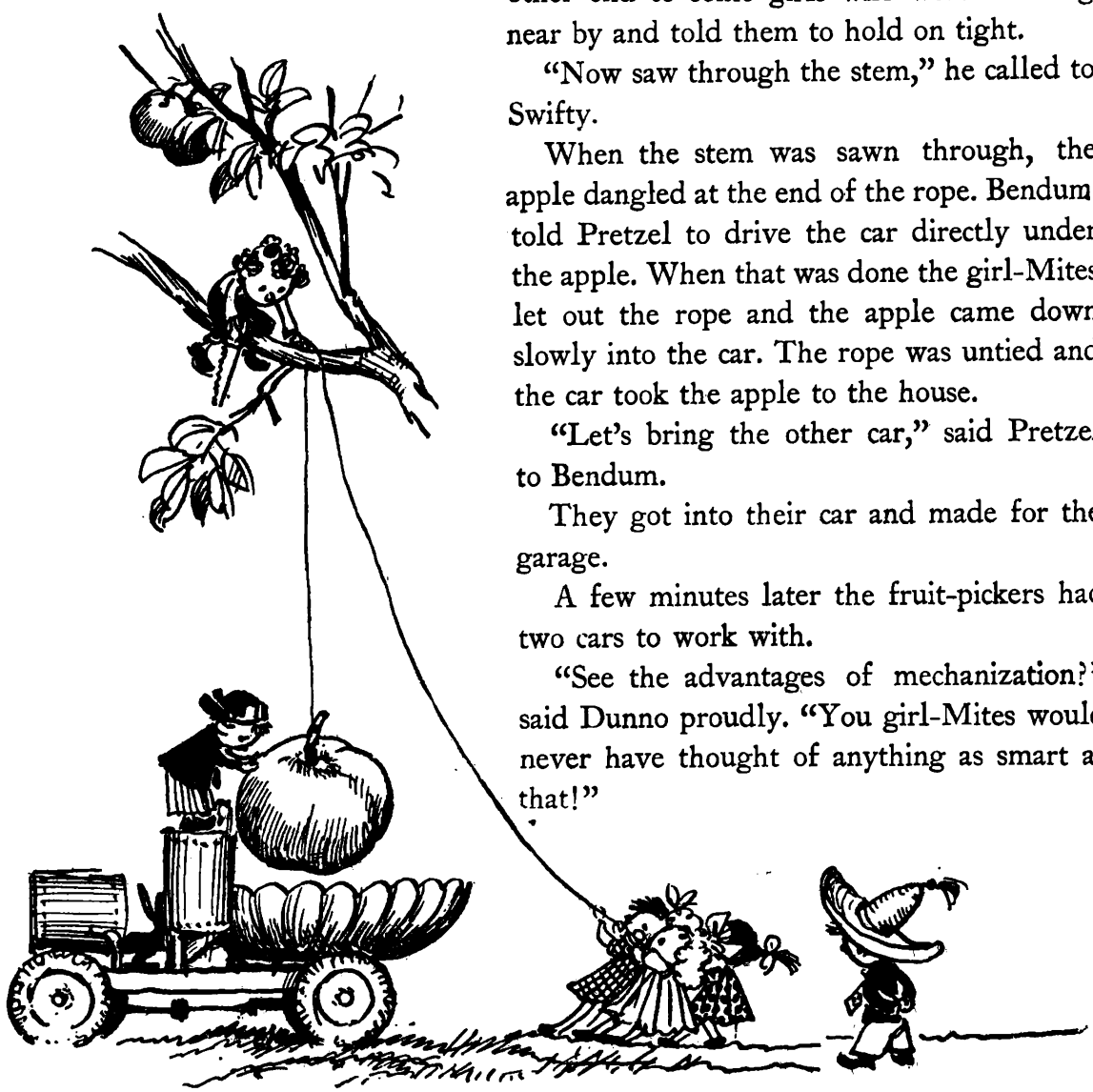
When the stem was sawn through, the apple dangled at the end of the rope. Bendum told Pretzel to drive the car directly under the apple. When that was done the girl-Mites let out the rope and the apple came down slowly into the car. The rope was untied and the car took the apple to the house.

"Let's bring the other car," said Pretzel to Bendum.

They got into their car and made for the garage.

A few minutes later the fruit-pickers had two cars to work with.

"See the advantages of mechanization?" said Dunno proudly. "You girl-Mites would never have thought of anything as smart as that!"

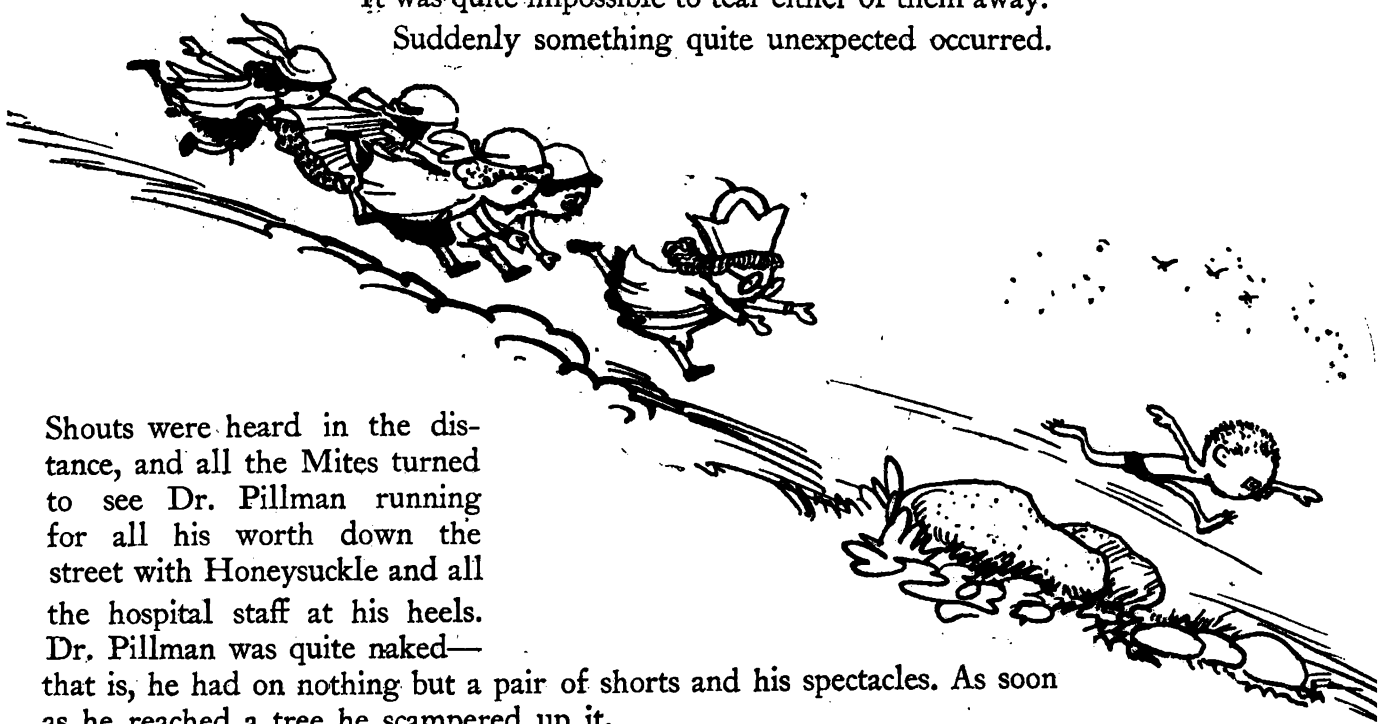


Chapter Twenty-Three

DR. PILLMAN AND GRUMPS RUN AWAY

The work went much faster now. The two cars darted here and there, taking the fruit to various cellars. Apples and pears were hauled one at a time, plums—five at a time. Mechanization left many of the Mites with nothing to do, but instead of sitting down and folding their hands, they opened up two street stands. In one of them they had soda-water and syrup, in the other—pies, cakes, biscuits, and sweets. The fruit-pickers could now get themselves refreshments whenever they had an off-minute.

Roly-Poly besieged the pies stand. Treacly-Sweeter the one providing soda-water and syrup. It was quite impossible to tear either of them away. Suddenly something quite unexpected occurred.



Shouts were heard in the distance, and all the Mites turned to see Dr. Pillman running for all his worth down the street with Honeysuckle and all the hospital staff at his heels. Dr. Pillman was quite naked—that is, he had on nothing but a pair of shorts and his spectacles. As soon as he reached a tree he scampered up it.

"What do you mean by running away, patient?" Honeysuckle shouted up at him.

"I'm not your patient any more," called down Dr. Pillman, trying to climb as high as he could.

"Yes, you are. You haven't been let out of the hospital yet," said Honeysuckle.

"I have been let out," laughed Dr. Pillman. "I let myself out," and he stuck out his tongue at her.

"Wretch!" cried Honeysuckle. "Don't think we'll give you back your clothes!"

"I haven't asked you to," said Dr. Pillman.

"You'll catch cold."

"I won't go back to your hospital even if I do."

"Shame on you!" cried Honeysuckle. "A doctor showing such lack of respect for medicine!"

Whirling round on her heel, she marched away with her head held high. All the hospital attendants marched after her.

As soon as the danger had passed, Dr. Pillman climbed down.

He was instantly surrounded by girl-Mites who showed the greatest concern for him.

"Aren't you cold?" they asked. "You'll catch a chill. Would you like us to bring you some clothes?"

"I would," said Dr. Pillman.

Fluff ran home and brought him a white dress with green stripes on it.

"What's that?" said Dr. Pillman with popping eyes. "You don't think I'll put on a dress, do you? Everyone'd take me for a girl."

"Well, and what of it? Is it so awful to be a girl?"

"Yes, it is."

"Why is it? So you think girls are bad, do you?"

"Oh no, you're very good, but ... er ... boys are better," stuttered Dr. Pillman.

"Why are they better? Tell us that, if you please."

"They're better because ... well, take Trills for instance. He's an excellent musician. You ought to hear him play the flute."

"We have heard him. Lots of our girls play the harp."

"And then there's Blobs. You should see how he paints portraits!"

"We have. But Blobs is your only artist, while all of us can draw and embroider pretty designs in coloured thread. Could you embroider a red squirrel like the one on my pinafore?" asked Chippy.

"I'm afraid I couldn't," admitted Dr. Pillman.

"See that? But any of us could, and not only squirrels, but bunnies or butterflies or anything else."

"Well, have it your own way," said Dr. Pillman resignedly as he pulled the dress up over his legs.

When it was on he stared down his front and over his shoulder, trying to see what he looked like. Dunno let out a shout of laughter. All the other boys laughed too.

"Shame on you!" cried Kitty indignantly. "There's nothing to laugh at!"

But they kept on laughing. Seeing this, Dr. Pillman took off the dress.

"Oh, but you mustn't!" cried the girls.

"Yes, I must," said Dr. Pillman very definitely. "Soon I'll get back my own clothes."

"Honeysuckle won't give them back to you. She's very strict, you know."

But Dr. Pillman only gave a mysterious smile.

When Honeysuckle and her helpers returned to the hospital, they discovered that Grumps, too, was gone. They rushed to the closet and found out that two sets of clothes had disappeared. Shot's were the only clothes left.

And so it was clear that the escape of Dr. Pillman and Grumps had been carefully planned. According to this plan, Dr. Pillman was to have jumped out the window naked. The conspirators counted on having Honeysuckle and all the hospital attendants set out after him, thereby giving Grumps an opportunity to go to the closet, take out his and Dr. Pillman's clothes, and walk straight out without anyone to stop him. The plan was carried out down to the last detail.

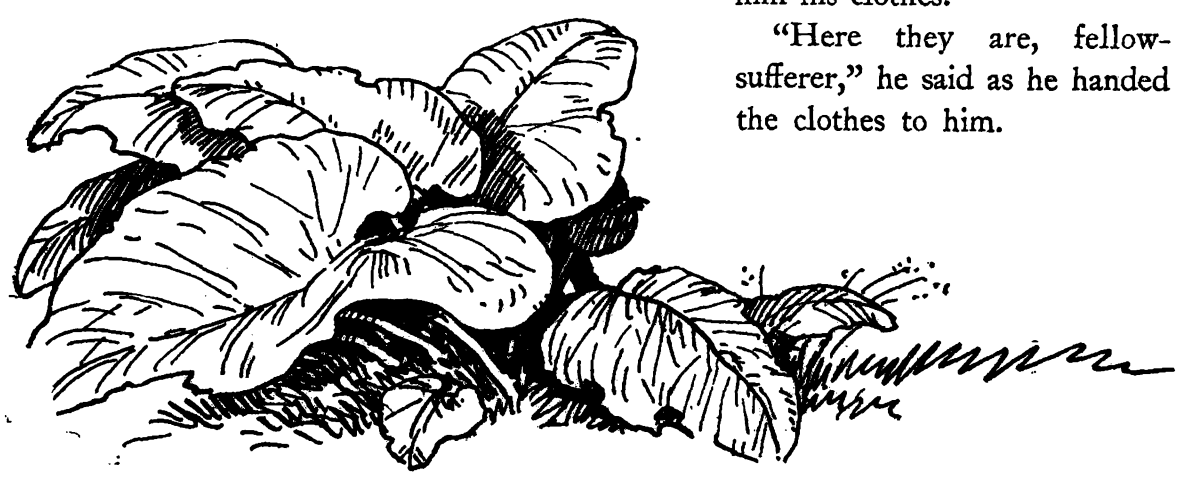
Once outside Grumps hid in some burdock leaves. For a long time Honeysuckle searched for him and the clothes, but in vain.

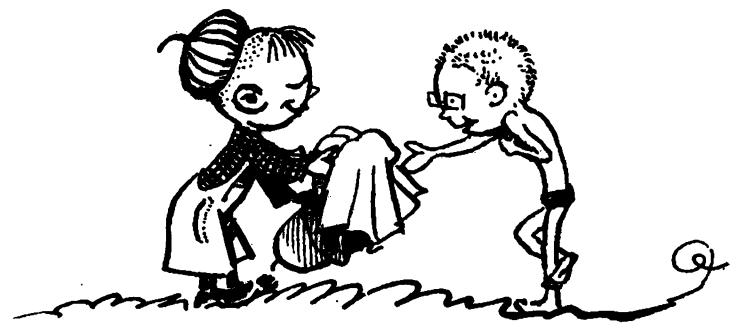
Although Grumps was not very comfortable crouching in the burdock leaves, he was beside himself with the joy of being free. He could not get enough of gazing at the clear blue sky and the fresh green grass. A smile came to his lips, and he swore he would never grumble again if only he did not have to go back to that hospital.

At last he saw Honeysuckle give up the search. As soon as the hospital door shut behind her he crawled cautiously out of his hiding place and set out to find Dr. Pillman.

When he found him he gave him his clothes.

"Here they are, fellow-sufferer," he said as he handed the clothes to him.





Dr. Pillman threw his arms about his friend's neck. They had grown very fond of each other while in hospital. Dr. Pillman was dressed in a jiffy.

Scatterbrain, P'raps, Bendum, and other boys crowded round Grumps and congratulated him on his escape. All of them were astonished to see him looking so cheerful.

"It's the first time I've ever seen Grumps smile," said Roly-Poly.

The girls gathered round him, too.

"What's your name?" Fluff asked him.

"Grumps."

"Oh no! You must be fooling!"

"I'm not. What makes you think I am?"

"You look so kind and good-natured. The name doesn't suit you in the least."

Grumps' mouth stretched almost from ear to ear.

"It's me that doesn't suit the name," he said.

"Would you like to climb a tree?" said Kitty.

"May I?"

"Why not? We'll bring you a saw and you can join us in our work."

"Bring me one too," said Dr. Pillman.

"You don't deserve it because you have such a bad opinion of girls," said Kitty. "But we'll forgive you."

Two more saws were brought and Grumps and the doctor set to work along with the others. Grumps said it was much more fun to climb trees than to be shut up in the hospital.

"And much healthier," added Dr. Pillman.

He considered that the higher you went, the purer the air, and so he and Grumps climbed to the very top of the tree.

Chapter Twenty-Four

BLOBS' EFFICIENCY MEASURE

The gathering of apples and pears went on all the next day. A third car came to help them—the eight-wheeled steam one belonging to Taps.

This came about in the following way.

The inhabitants of Kite Town were worried about the disappearance of Pretzel. They knew that he had driven Bendum and Twistum back to Greenville in his car, and when he did not return they feared some accident might have happened and asked Taps to drive over and find out. Taps did so. When he saw Pretzel hauling apples in his car, he wanted to do the same thing. Soon he was busy working with the others.

His friends back in Kite Town waited for him all that day and the next. When he, too, did not come back the most dreadful rumours began to circulate. Some said the old witch Baba-Yaga was encamped on the road between the two towns and ate up everyone who tried to pass. Others said it was not Baba-Yaga, but the ogre Kashchei the Deathless. Still others tried to prove that there were no such things as ogres, but that a three-headed dragon had come to Greenville. Every day this dragon ate up one of the girls, and if a boy put in an appearance it ate him instead, for boys tasted better than girls.

The tale of the dragon was so frightening that none of the boys had the courage to go to Greenville and find out what the trouble was. They decided that the wisest thing to do was to sit at home. But at last one of the inhabitants of Kite Town announced that he was not afraid of any old dragon, and that he would go and find out. This was the notorious Nails, of whom we have already spoken. Everyone knew that Nails was a daredevil who would not hesitate to throw himself into the very jaws of a hungry dragon. They tried to talk him out of going, but

he would not listen to them. He said that he was ashamed of having caused the girls in Greenville so much trouble. Now, he said, he was going to make good all the harm he had done them. He would go to Greenville and spit on the tail of the dragon, and this would make the dragon curl up and die and the girls would be saved. Where he ever got the idea that spitting on the dragon's tail would make it curl up and die it is hard to say.

Well, he went. Many of the boys were very sorry to see him go and mourned his loss in advance. Others said there was nothing to mourn over, that if he were lost there would just be one mischief-maker the less and life would run more smoothly without him.

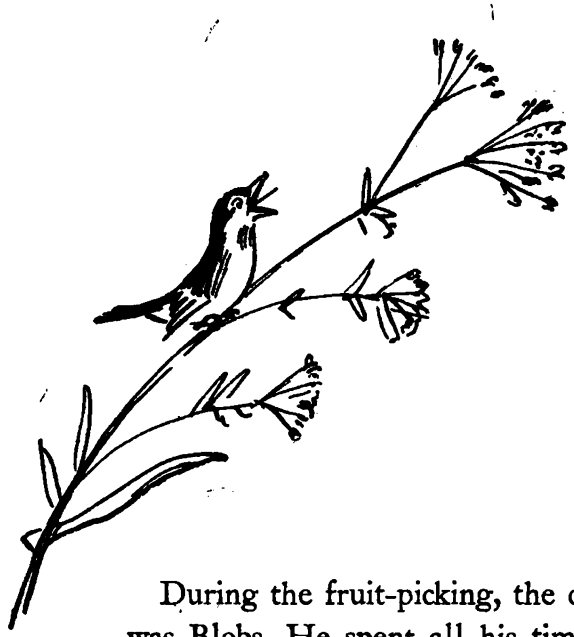
"But it's our fault that we could not reform him," said the mourners.

"Reform him?" said the others. "Nothing but the grave could reform him!"

It is clear that those who mourned Nails were those who had never got a taste of his tricks, and those who did not mourn him were those who had got a very good taste of them.

Nails, as might be expected, did not come back to Kite Town. There could now be no doubt that there was a dragon in Greenville, and the most extraordinary stories were told about it. Each of the stories added another head, so that in the end the number of the dragon's heads had grown from three to one hundred.

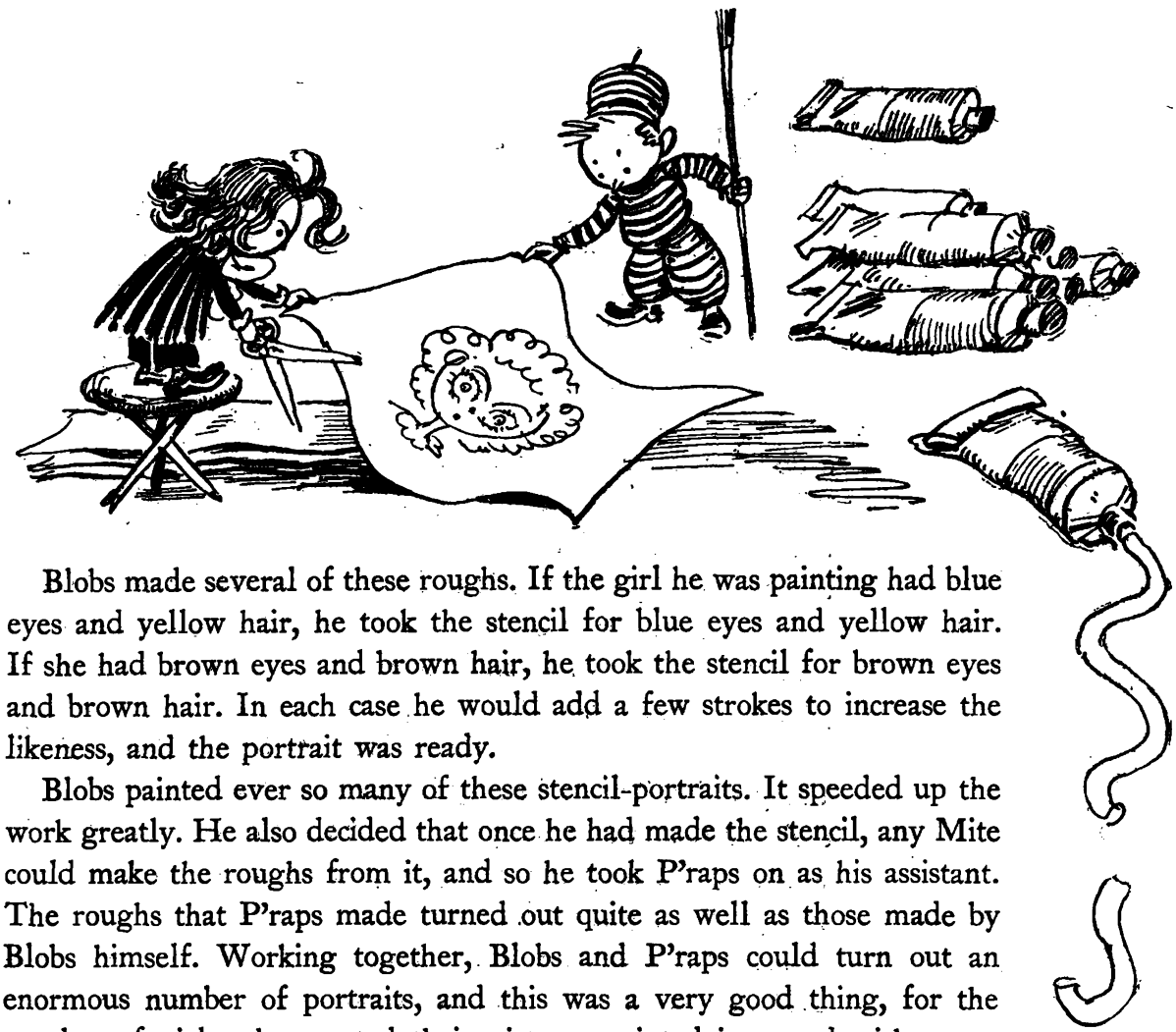
The stories, of course, were all made up.



Anyone with the least brains can easily guess why Nails didn't come back. At any rate, he was not gobbled up by the dragon, because nobody was gobbled up by the dragon. There was no dragon. Nails simply worked so hard picking apples that he forgot to come back. As soon as he got to Greenville he decided he must get a saw and climb a tree at any cost. After all, climbing trees is lots of fun, and is dangerous besides. What boy can resist doing what is dangerous?

During the fruit-picking, the only Mite in Greenville who sat at home was Blobs. He spent all his time painting portraits, for there was not a girl in town who did not ask to have her picture painted. Each wanted to be the prettiest girl in Greenville. Of no avail were Blobs' efforts to prove that every girl was pretty in her own way, and that even small eyes could be pretty. Oh no! Each of them must have big eyes, long lashes, arched eyebrows, and a tiny mouth. Blobs gave up arguing in the end, and painted them as they asked to be. That, he found, was the simplest way out. It kept them from complaining of their finished portraits, and it gave him a chance to try an "efficiency measure." Since all of them wanted to be painted in exactly the same way, Blobs decided to make what is called a "stencil." He took a piece of cardboard, cut into it a pair of big eyes, two long arched eyebrows, a very short straight nose, a tiny mouth, a chin with a dimple in it, and two small and shapely ears. On top he cut out fluffy hair, under the chin a slender neck; lower down two little hands with long fingers. When the stencil was ready he set to work making the "roughs."

This was done by putting the cardboard on a piece of paper and splashing red paint over the hole where the mouth was cut out; flesh-coloured paint over the holes where the nose, ears, and hands were; brown or yellow paint where the hair was; blue or brown paint where the eyes were.



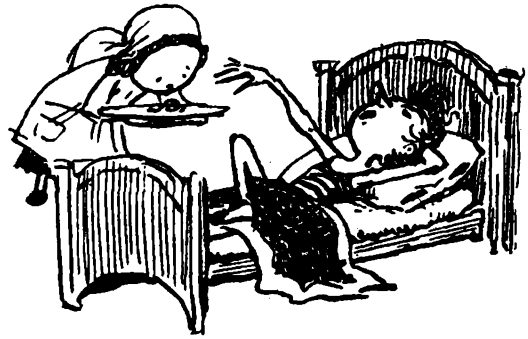
Blobs made several of these roughs. If the girl he was painting had blue eyes and yellow hair, he took the stencil for blue eyes and yellow hair. If she had brown eyes and brown hair, he took the stencil for brown eyes and brown hair. In each case he would add a few strokes to increase the likeness, and the portrait was ready.

Blobs painted ever so many of these stencil-portraits. It speeded up the work greatly. He also decided that once he had made the stencil, any Mite could make the roughs from it, and so he took P'raps on as his assistant. The roughs that P'raps made turned out quite as well as those made by Blobs himself. Working together, Blobs and P'raps could turn out an enormous number of portraits, and this was a very good thing, for the number of girls who wanted their pictures painted increased with every day.

P'raps was very much pleased with his new profession and spoke proudly of himself and Blobs as "we artists." Blobs was not at all pleased and called such painting "hack-work." He said the only portraits worthy of the name were those he had painted of Snowdrop and Cornflower—all the others were good for nothing but to wrap saucepans and flower-pots in.

Fortunately his opinion was not shared by the models. The only thing they demanded of a portrait was that it be pretty—as for being a likeness, who cared about that?

There are different ways, it seems, of looking at things.



Chapter Twenty-Five

SHOT IS CURED

After Grumps and Dr. Pillman had run away, all the nurses and hospital attendants took care of the only patient left—Shot. He was completely spoiled by so much attention. At one time he demanded that they make him soup out of gumdrops, and porridge out of jam, another time he ordered meat-cakes of strawberries with mushroom sauce (although everyone knows you can't make *meat*-cakes of strawberries). Still another time he asked for apple sauce, and when they brought it to him he said he had asked for stewed pears. They brought him the stewed pears, but he complained that they smelled of onions or something else just as unpleasant.

The poor nurses wore themselves out trying to satisfy his every whim. They said they had never seen such a patient in their lives, that it was a punishment to have to wait on him, and that the only thing they hoped for was that he would hurry up and get well.

Every morning he sent one of the nurses out to look for Dot. She would wander up and down the streets of Greenville looking for the dog until she was quite worn out, and when she came back to the hospital, hoping Shot had forgotten all about the dog, he would be sure to say to her:

"Well, did you find him?"

"No, I didn't," she would say.

"Then you couldn't have looked for him."

"But I did. I looked everywhere."

"Then why didn't I hear you calling him? Go and look for him again."

And the poor nurse would go out again without having the faintest idea where else to look.

"Dot, Dot! I wish you were dead!" she would call out from time to time.

She knew it would do no good to call, but she hoped the sound of her voice would satisfy Shot.

He sent another nurse to see what his friends were doing and to report to him three times a day: in the morning, after lunch, and in the evening. He made a third nurse tell him stories from morning to night, and if the stories were uninteresting he sent her away and demanded another nurse who was more entertaining. He became very angry if none of his friends came to see him, yet if they did come he would chase them away because they interrupted the stories.

Honeysuckle could see how spoiled he was becoming. She said he was twenty times worse than Grumps and Dr. Pillman taken together. Clearly he would be ruined if he were not let out soon, but there was the ankle. He himself had made it worse.

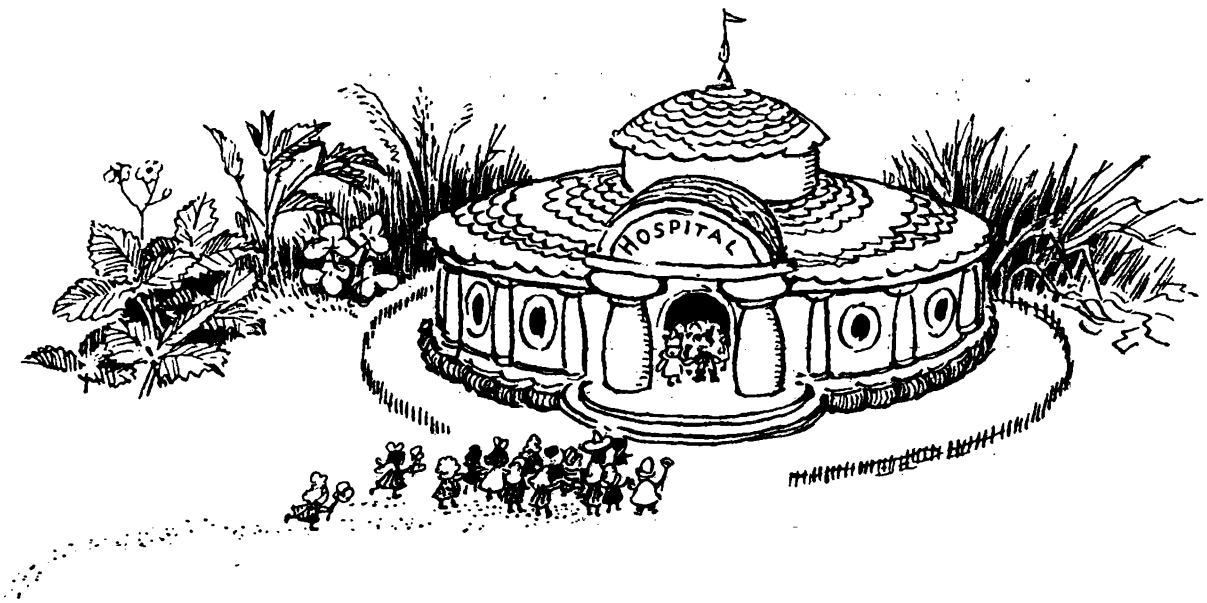
One morning when he woke up, he found that the pain in his leg was gone. He jumped out of bed and ran across the room, but before he had taken ten steps he sprained his ankle a second time. They carried him back to bed. His ankle swelled up and by evening he had a temperature. Honeysuckle sat by his bedside all night long without taking a wink of sleep. Thanks to her efforts the swelling went down, but his stay in hospital was greatly prolonged by this accident.

At last he was allowed to get out of bed for short periods. He managed to move about the room on a crutch and holding on to the wall. Little by little he learned to walk, and then they allowed him to go out in the courtyard of the hospital for an hour in the company of a nurse. These walks improved his temper. He grew less irritable, but even so he would get furious whenever the nurse told him it was time to go in.

"I won't go!" he would shout, shaking his crutch at her.

They had to pick him up bodily and carry him in.

Honeysuckle and her helpers took such good care of him that one day the doctor said he could leave hospital. All the boys and girls were delighted to hear such good news.



The next morning they all gathered in front of the hospital with flowers and presents.

"At last we're all together!" exclaimed Shot. "All, that is, but Doono and Dot."

"That's all right," they comforted him, "perhaps Doono and Dot will turn up yet."

"They won't turn up of themselves," said Shot. "We've got to look for them."

"Yes," said Dunno, "we'll have to look for that foolish Doono. He may come to harm if we don't."

"Why do you call him foolish?" said Dr. Pillman.

"Because he is, and he's a coward besides," said Dunno.

"He is not," began Grumps, but Dunno interrupted him.

"You hold your tongue," he said. "Who's chief here, you or me? Or perhaps you'd like to go back to that hospital?"

At the mention of the hospital, Grumps became silent.

"On Sunday we're giving a ball to celebrate everybody's getting well," said Snowdrop. "After that you can set out on a search for your foolish Doono. When you find him, we'll give another ball. Won't that be lovely?"

"Splendid! Splendid!" cried everybody.

It is not certain what pleased them more: the prospect of finding Doono, or of giving another ball on his account.

The fruit-picking was over. All the cellars were filled to overflowing, but there were still many apples, pears, and plums left on the trees. It was decided to make the boys in Kite Town a present of them.

The only thing the Greenville Mites thought of now was the ball. Everybody pitched in to help with the preparations. Some of them weeded the circle of ground that was to be the dance floor, other stamped down the earth to make it hard and smooth. Swifty, Mums and Nails undertook the building of a two-tiered stand for the orchestra. Pavilions were put up for providing soda-water, ice-cream, and other refreshments. All of this work was done to the accompaniment of music, for Trills had formed an orchestra of the ten best harpists in Greenville, and they rehearsed day and night.

The most surprising thing of all was the enthusiasm with which Nails worked. He did everything he was told to without causing the least trouble. He was, in fact, quite a different boy.

"How nice of you to help us!" Kitty said to him.

"Why shouldn't I?" he replied. "I'll do anything you ask if I bust in the doing!"

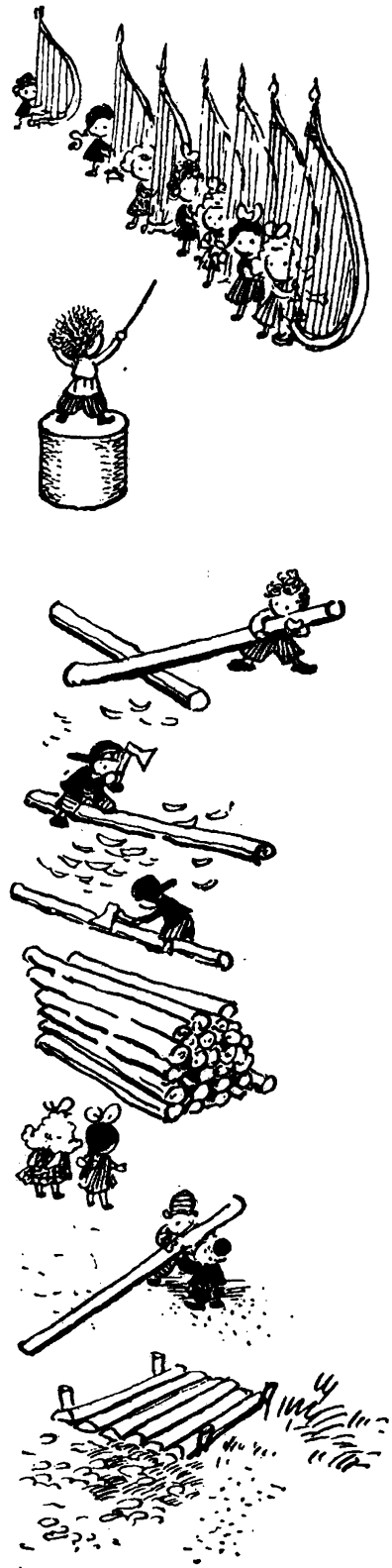
"It's a pleasure to see anybody try so hard," said Birdie. "You must enjoy working, don't you?"

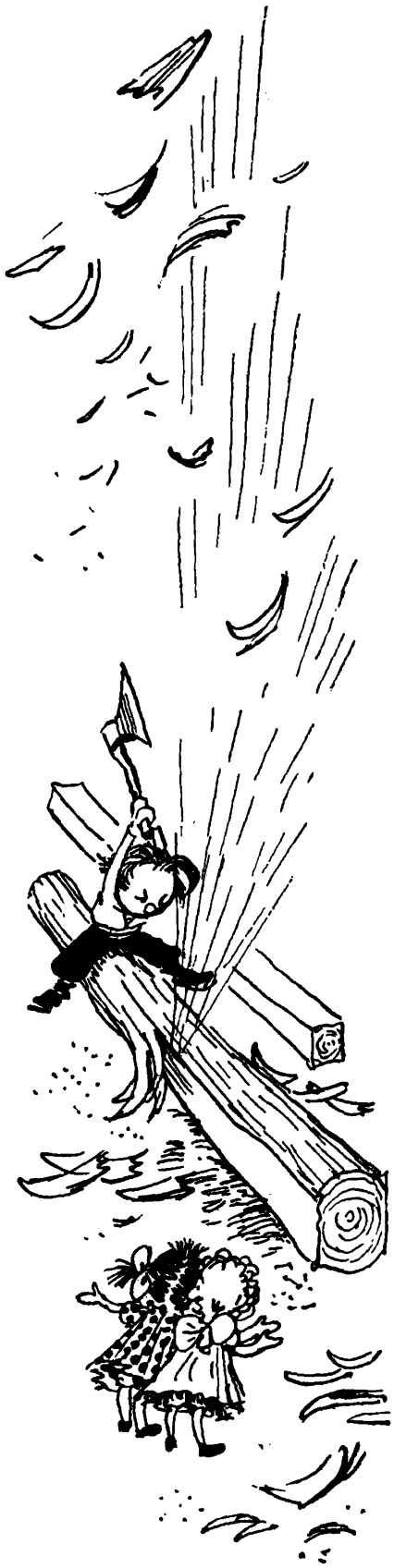
"I sure do," said Nails. "I like to be busy. I feel lost when I'm not, and so I do things I oughtn't to. It usually ends in a row, and I get my puss dusted."

Nails snuffled loudly and wiped his nose with his fist.

"What does that mean?" asked Kitty.

"It means I get my nose blown for me," said Nails.





"And what does *that* mean?"

"It means I get a good sock on the nose."

"Poor dear!" cried Kitty. "Well, don't do things you oughtn't to any more. Come and see us and we'll always find something to keep you busy—a fence that needs mending, or a window that wants glazing."

"Thanks," said Nails.

"Are you coming to our ball?"

"May I?"

"Of course you may. Only wash yourself first, and brush your clothes. We want you to come."

"I'll be only too glad to. Thanks again."

Kitty was very much touched by the way he said "thanks" and by the politeness of his manner in general. She turned pink with pleasure, and, pulling Birdie to one side, whispered into her ear:

"It won't be at all hard to reform him."

"We must praise him more often," said Birdie. "That will do him good. You must always scold a boy for being naughty, and praise him for being good. Next time he'll try to be good so that you will praise him again. But Nails' manners still need working on. Did you notice the way he snuffled?"

"Yes, and his language needs improving," said Kitty. "Did you ever hear such words as 'bust,' 'puss,' 'sock'? We'll have to get him out of the habit of using such horrid words."

Nails was so pleased to be praised that he really did try his best. After all, anyone likes to be praised.

Chapter Twenty-Six

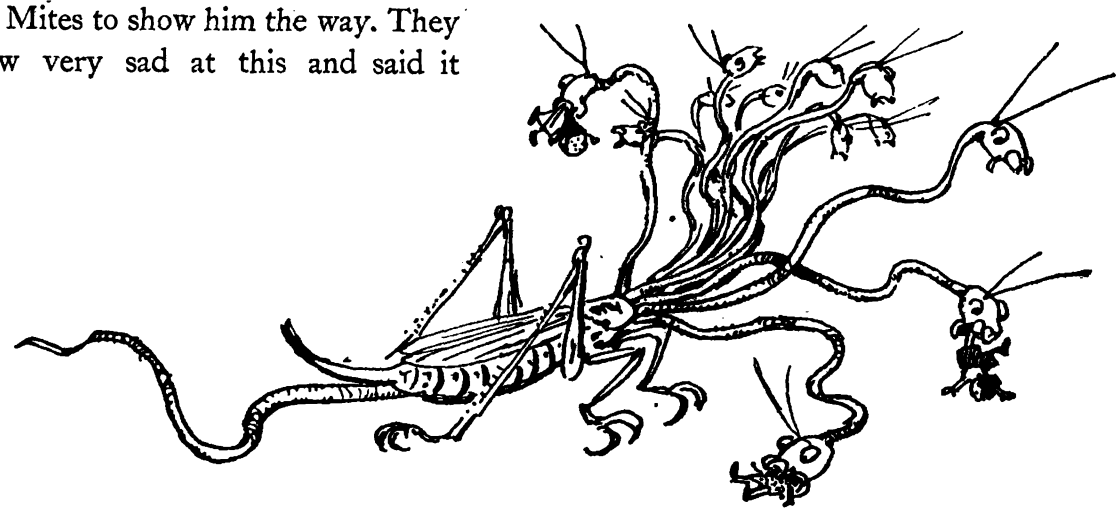
THE RETURN OF NAILS

When Nails failed to come back, none of the other inhabitants of Kite Town risked going to Greenville. Rumour had it that soon the hundred-headed dragon would have eaten up all the girls and would come to Kite Town to eat the boys. Time went on and the dragon did not appear, but one fine morning a stranger did. This stranger said he had gone up in a balloon with some friends and had jumped with a parachute when the balloon had begun to fall. He had landed in a dense forest and been roaming about in search of his friends ever since.

It is not hard to guess who the stranger was. Doono, of course. Instead of calmly going home when he landed with his parachute, he had set out in search of his friends.

The inhabitants of Kite Town told him that a few days before some boy-Mites whose balloon had crashed had appeared in Greenville. Two of them had come to Kite Town for a soldering-iron and had been taken back to Greenville by a driver named Pretzel. Doono asked some questions about these two Mites, and when he was told what they looked like and that they both had on leather jackets, he knew at once that they were Bendum and Twistum. The writer Slick, who was present at the interview and had his chatterbox with him, said they were indeed named Bendum and Twistum.

Doono was delighted. He wanted to go to Greenville at once, and asked the Mites to show him the way. They grew very sad at this and said it



was impossible to go to Greenville because there was a hundred-headed dragon in Greenville that ate up girl-Mites, to say nothing of boy-Mites.

"Pooh, pooh!" scoffed Doono. "As if there was such a thing as a hundred-headed dragon!"

"Oh, you just don't know!" said one of the Mites, shaking his head. "Who else could have eaten up Pretzel? It's been days and days since he took Bendum and Twistum to Greenville, and he hasn't come back yet."

"Who else could have gobbled up Taps?" asked another. "He went to Greenville in search of Pretzel and hasn't come back either. And what a fine plumber he was! There was nothing he couldn't do!"

"Who else could have swallowed down Nails?" asked a third. "True, it's not such a pity about him because he was such a little scamp, but even so it's rather hard to be eaten up."

Doono considered a moment.

"Science knows nothing about the existence of hundred-headed dragons," he said at last, "and therefore we may consider that they don't exist."

"But science knows nothing about their non-existence, either," put in Slick, "and therefore we may consider that they do exist. There must be hundred-headed dragons, once Mites talk about them."

"But Mites talk about Baba-Yaga, too," said Doono.

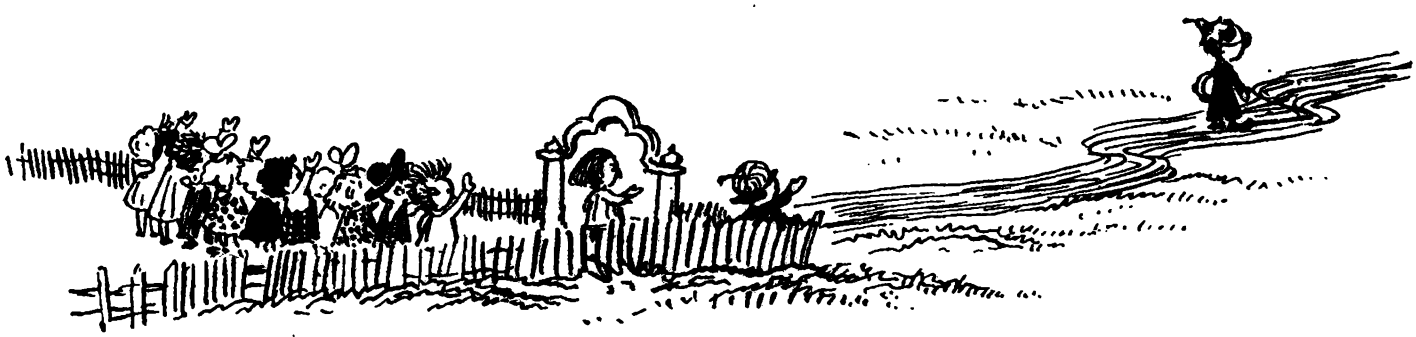
"And don't you believe in Baba-Yaga?"

"Of course I don't."

"Come now, none of your fairy-tales."

"It's Baba-Yaga who is the fairy-tale."

Doono firmly resolved to go to Greenville, and, try as they might, the inhabitants of Kite Town could not make him change his mind. And so, after giving him a good meal, they took him to the edge of the town and



pointed out the road to Greenville. They were sure he was going to his death, and so it was with tears in their eyes that they parted with him.

Just then a cloud of dust appeared on the road. The nearer it came the bigger it got. The Mites ran away as fast as their legs would carry them. Once safe inside their houses, they peeked out of the windows. They were sure it was the hundred-headed dragon coming to eat them up. But Doono was not frightened in the least, he just stood there waiting in the middle of the road.

Soon everyone saw that the dust was being raised by three motor cars that came one after the other. The first car was hauling a big red apple, the second a ripe pear, the third half a dozen plums. When the first car reached Doono it came to a halt and out climbed Pretzel, Taps, and Nails. Immediately the Mites rushed out of their houses and threw their arms about all three of them, including Nails. They asked about the dragon, and when they heard that there was no dragon and never had been one, they were greatly astonished.

"Then what kept you away so long?" they asked.

"We were helping the girls gather in their fruit harvest," said Nails.

This made everybody laugh.

"*You* helped?" they scoffed. "The others may have, but surely you did nothing but climb fences and break windows!"

"I did not," said Nails, deeply hurt. "I worked too. I'm ... what do you call it? ... reformed."

Taps and Pretzel said he really was reformed, and that the girls were very much pleased with his work—so pleased, in fact, that they decided to make the inhabitants of Kite Town a present of apples, pears, and plums. Nothing could have pleased the boys more, for they were very fond of fruit.

When Pretzel heard that Doono was on his way to Greenville, he offered to take him there in his car, and very soon they set out.

The boys in Kite Town went about with smiles on their faces. They were very glad that there was no dragon, and that Pretzel and Taps had come back, but the thing that pleased them most was Nails' reform. Some, it was true, doubted that he was really reformed, and they kept a close eye on him, expecting to see him break a window any moment. But in a little while they found him down by the river washing his clothes.

"Why should you wash your clothes all of a sudden like this?" they asked him.

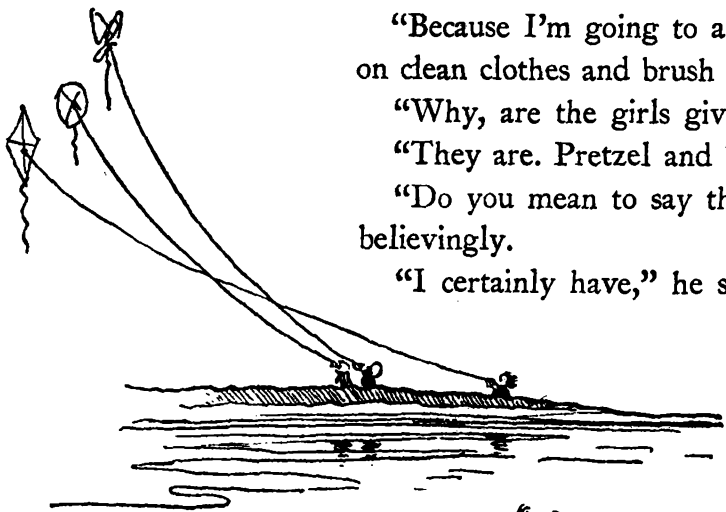
"Because I'm going to a ball tomorrow," he said. "You've got to put on clean clothes and brush your hair when you go to a ball."

"Why, are the girls giving a ball?"

"They are. Pretzel and Taps are going, too. They've been invited."

"Do you mean to say that *you*'ve been invited?" they asked him unbelievingly.

"I certainly have," he said.



"Tck, tck, tschk," said the Mites, shaking their heads. "You must be reformed indeed if the girls have invited you to their ball. Who could have imagined such a thing!"

Chapter Twenty-Seven

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER

Preparations for the ball were in full swing. The stand for the orchestra and the pavilions around the dance floor were ready. Blobs painted fancy designs on the orchestra stand and the other boys painted the pavilions every colour of the rainbow. The girls decorated the dance floor with flowers, flags, and coloured lanterns. Dunno rushed about giving orders as usual. The work went too slowly to please him, and so he shouted and made a fuss and got in everybody's way. Fortunately everybody knew what he was to do without being told.

One of the Mites had the idea of building benches round the dance floor, but it turned out there were not enough boards to build them with. Dunno was furious.

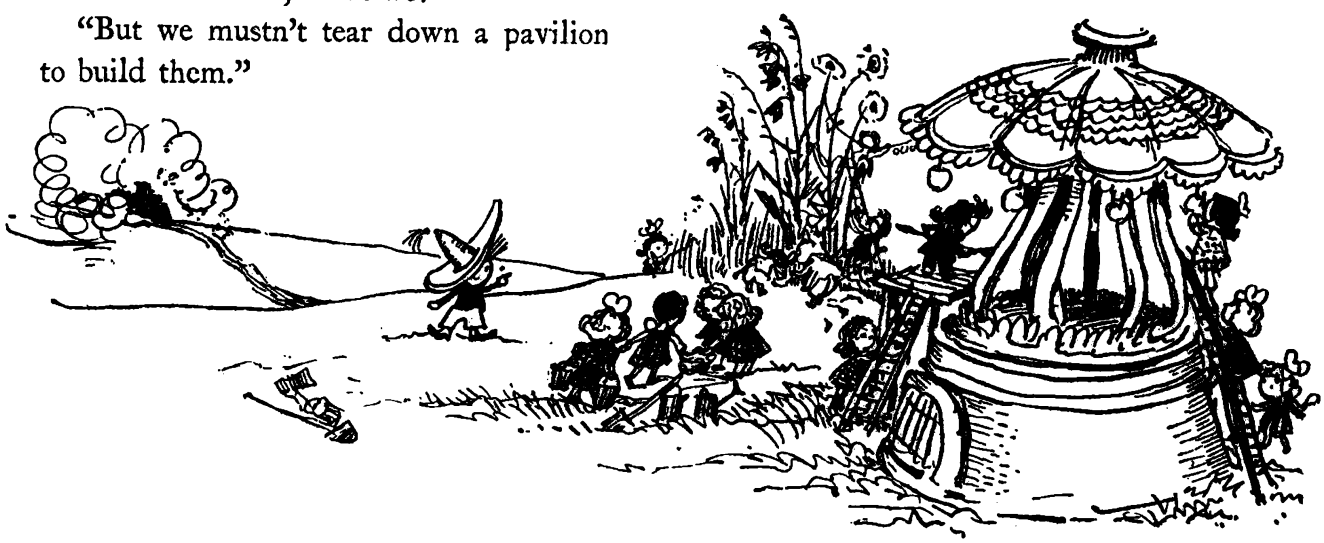
"What! Let all the cars go back to Kite Town before you'd hauled enough boards!" he shouted. "Then we'll have to tear down one of the pavilions."

"Right you are!" cried P'raps, snatching up an axe and making for the nearest pavilion.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed Blobs. "Have we built and painted all these things just to tear them down?"

"It's none of your business," said P'raps. "We need benches, don't we?"

"But we mustn't tear down a pavilion to build them."



"Mind your own business," shouted Dunno. "Who's in charge here, you or me? If the order's been given to tear it down, it's got to be torn down."

Nobody knows how this quarrel would have ended if a car had not appeared in the distance at that very moment.

"Pretzel's come back!" everybody cried happily. "Now we can bring some more boards and we won't have to tear down a pavilion."

The car drew up. Out of it climbed Pretzel. Behind him appeared another boy-Mite. Everyone stared at him in amazement.

"Good heavens, it's our Doono!" cried Dr. Pillman.

"Doono has come!" cried Scatterbrain.

Doono was instantly surrounded by his friends, who hugged and kissed him.

"At last we've found you!" they said.

"You found me?" said Doono in surprise. "It seems to me that I found you."

"That's true, you found us, but we thought you had left us for good."

"I left you?" said the amazed Doono again. "It seems to me that *you* left me."

"It was you who jumped with a parachute and left us behind," said Roly-Poly.

"Why did you stay behind? I told you all to jump. You should have jumped after me because the balloon could not go on sailing much longer. But you got cold feet, I suppose."

"Yes, we got cold feet," they admitted.

"They were afraid to jump," said Dunno. "By the way, who was the first to get cold feet?"

"The first? You were the first," said Prob'ly.

"Me?" said Dunno in surprise.

"Yes, you," they all cried out. "Who was it said we oughtn't to jump? Wasn't it you?"

"Oh, very well, let it be me," said Dunno, "but why did you listen to me?"

"Quite right," laughed Doono. "A fine person to listen to! As if you didn't know Dunno was a dunce!"

"That's a nice thing to say," said Dunno with a shrug of his shoulders. "So I'm a dunce, am I?"

"And a coward," added Treacly-Sweeter.

"And a fibber," said Roly-Poly.

"When did I ever fib?" asked Dunno.

"Who was it said you were the one who made the balloon?" asked Roly-Poly.

"You must be mistaken," gasped Dunno. "I never made a balloon in my life. It was Doono who made the balloon."

"And who was it said you were the one in charge?" asked Treacly-Sweeter.

"How could I be in charge? I'm just ... just nobody," said Dunno.

"And that's just what we'll take you for from now on," said Treacly-Sweeter. "Doono's in charge from now on."

At this the girls, who had been listening all this time, began to laugh. It was clear to them that Dunno was just an ordinary braggart.

Minny and Winny rushed off to tell all their friends that Dunno was a fibber and that it was Doono and not he who had made the balloon.

Cornflower went over to Dunno and said with contempt:

"Why did you fool us? We took you at your word and thought you were a brave, clever, honest Mite. But it turns out you're a coward and a fibber."

She turned proudly away from him and went over to Doono, who was surrounded by a crowd of Mites. Everyone wanted to hear what he had to say.

"Is it true that when you're up in the air the earth looks to be no bigger than a jam tart?" Chippy asked him.

"No, it isn't," said Doono. "The earth is so big that the higher you go the bigger it looks, because you get a broader and broader view of it."

"And is it true that the clouds are solid and you had to chop your way through them with an axe?" asked Cornflower.

"No, that isn't true either," said Doono. "The clouds are as soft as air because they are made of mist. Of course you don't have to chop your way through them with an axe."

They went on asking him if it was true that a balloon is blown up with steam, and that it can sail upside-down, and that when they were up above the clouds it was one thousand and two-tenths degrees below zero. Doono replied that none of these things were true.

"Who ever told you such nonsense?" he asked.

"Dunno did," giggled Birdie.

Everyone turned to Dunno and burst out laughing. He turned red as a beet and wished the earth would swallow him up. Suddenly he ran away and hid in some dandelion plants.

"I'll stay here until they forget about me," he said to himself.

Doono was very anxious to see Greenville, and so Cornflower, Snowdrop, and a few other girls took him sight-seeing. He made a careful inspection of the bridge over the river, and of the system of water-supply. He was very much interested in the reed pipes and the fountains. The girls gave him a detailed explanation of how the pipes were laid and how the fountains were made so that the water shot upwards and not downwards. Doono was very much pleased to find Greenville so neat and clean. He praised the girls for laying carpets even in the streets and on the pavements. They were so happy that they invited him to see the inside of their houses, which was just as clean as the outside. In one of the houses Doono saw a bookcase with books in it, and he said that when he got home he would be sure to make himself a bookcase.

"Why, don't you have one?" asked the girls.

"No, I don't," admitted Doono.

"Then where do you keep your books?"

Doono dismissed the question with a little wave of his hand. He was ashamed to admit that his books just lay on the table and under the table and even under the bed.

Doono was interested in the water-melons, too. The girls told him about Thistle, and he said he would like to meet her. They introduced him to her and Doono asked all sorts of questions about her work. As she told him her methods of raising fruit and vegetables he listened attentively and even made notes in his note-book.

"That's a clever boy for you," said the girls. "Anyone can see he's eager to learn."

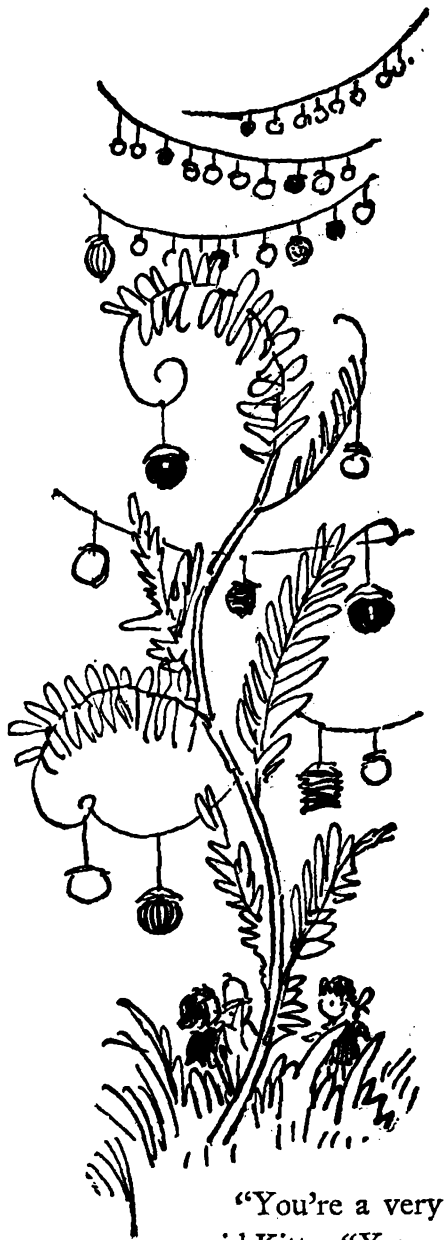
Meanwhile Dunno had grown tired of hiding in the dandelions. From time to time he would crawl out, but he was sorry every time. The girls paid not the slightest attention to him, they acted as if he did not exist, but the boys, on the other hand, gave him no peace.

"Dunno's a fibber!" they shouted. "Dunno's a braggart! Dunno's a coward!"

"They don't seem to have forgotten yet," he said unhappily. "I'd better get back into the dandelions."

A little later he crawled out again and the same thing happened.

"I won't crawl out any more," he resolved. "I've got to be strong. I've got to stay here a long, long time—maybe until tomorrow morning. I won't come out until the ball begins."



Chapter Twenty-Eight

DUNNO IS FORGIVEN

The next day was the long-awaited day of the ball.

Gay pavilions surrounded the dance floor. They were as bright and colourful as the houses in a fairy-tale. Wires with coloured flags and lanterns hanging from them were strung across the dance floor. Flags and lanterns were hanging from all the trees as well, making them look like Christmas-trees.

The orchestra of ten girl-Mites sat on top of a stand all decked in flowers. Each of the girls played a harp. Some of the harps were small enough to be held in the players' hands. Others were a bit bigger, and were held on the knee. Still others stood on the floor. One of the harps was so big that the player had to stand on a step-ladder to reach it.

It was not yet evening when the girl-Mites gathered round the dance floor and stood waiting for their guests from Kite Town. The first to arrive was Nails. He was washed and brushed and had put on a clean shirt. True, one lock of hair stood straight up on the top of his head, but even so you could see he had taken great pains with his hair.

"You're a very good little Mite now," said Kitty. "You yourself must find it pleasant to be so neat and clean, don't you?"

"Yes, indeed," said Nails, giving his shirt a little tug.

The next to arrive were Taps and Pretzel, and behind them came all the others.

No one had invited them, but each said he had come to thank the girls for the fruit, and he was immediately invited to stay for the ball.

Dunno really did hide in the dandelions until the ball began. That is, he slept in the dandelions, but as soon as he heard the boy-Mites arriving he crawled out and made for the dance floor.

"Ah, the fibber has come, too!" they cried on seeing him. "Hullo, fibber! Maybe you'll tell us how you sailed upside-down in the balloon?"

"Or how you ate clouds instead of strawberry ice-cream!" added Roly-Poly, running up to him.

Dunno was cut to the quick. He instantly whirled round and walked away. His friends laughed and called after him, but he did not hear them.

Too miserable to notice where he was going, he walked on and on until he came to the end of the town and bumped straight into a fence, giving his head a nasty bang. When he looked up he saw written on the fence. "Dunno's a dunce!"

They're even writing about me on the fences, he thought in despair.

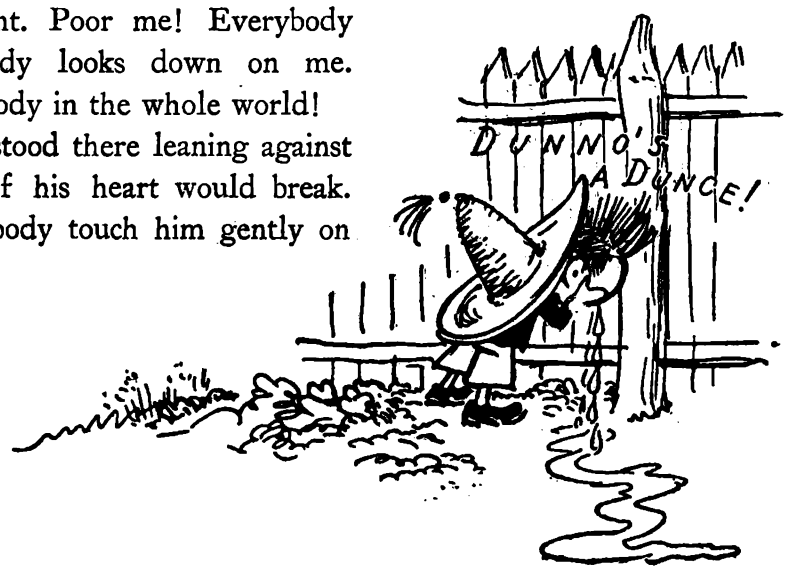
He had never felt so sorry for anybody in his life as he felt for himself at that moment. He leaned against the fence and the tears coursed down his cheeks.

Poor me! he thought. Poor me! Everybody laughs at me. Everybody looks down on me. Nobody loves me—nobody in the whole world!

For a long time he stood there leaning against the fence, crying as if his heart would break. Suddenly he felt somebody touch him gently on the shoulder, and heard someone say tenderly:

"Don't cry, Dunno!"

He looked up and saw Cornflower.



"Don't cry," she repeated.

Dunno turned away, clutched the fence, and cried harder than ever. Cornflower stroked him on the shoulder without saying a word. Dunno shrugged his shoulder, to get rid of her hand and gave a little kick.

"Don't be so nasty," she said as gently as ever. "You aren't really like that, you're a good kind Mite. It was just because you wanted to be better that you fibbed and boasted so. But you won't do that any more, will you? Say you won't."

Dunno said nothing.

"Do say you won't. You're such a good little Mite."

"No, I'm not. I'm bad."

"There are others who are worse."

"No, there are not. I'm the very worst."

"That's not true. Nails was much worse than you. You never made the trouble Nails did, but even he reformed in the end. If you want to, you can, too. Just say you won't do those wicked things any more and will make a clean start and we'll never even remind you of the past."

"Very well: I'll never do them again," muttered Dunno sullenly.

"Good for you!" said Cornflower happily. "All you have to do is try to be a good, brave, honest Mite and not to misbehave yourself and you'll never have to think of ways of making yourself seem better than you really are. Isn't that true?"

"I s'pose so."

He glanced ruefully at Cornflower and smiled through his tears.

"Come, let's go and join the others," said Cornflower, taking his hand.

Soon they reached the dance floor. When Roly-Poly saw Dunno coming back with Cornflower he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Dunno the fibber! Dunno the dunce!"

"Tell us how you swallowed the clouds!" cried out Treacly-Sweeter.

"Shame on you!" cried Cornflower. "Why should you make fun of him?"

"What did he have to fool us for?" said Roly-Poly.

"Was it *you* he fooled?" said Cornflower in surprise. "It was *us* he fooled and you never said a word. That makes you quite as bad as he is."

"Just exactly as bad!" cried Snowdrop. "You knew he was boasting and fibbing and you didn't stop him. Not one of you told him he shouldn't. What makes you think you are any better than he is?"

"We don't," muttered Roly-Poly.

"Then you have no right to make fun of him," said Kitty. "Anyone else would have tried to help him."

Roly-Poly and Treacly-Sweeter felt so ashamed of themselves that they stopped making fun of Dunno.

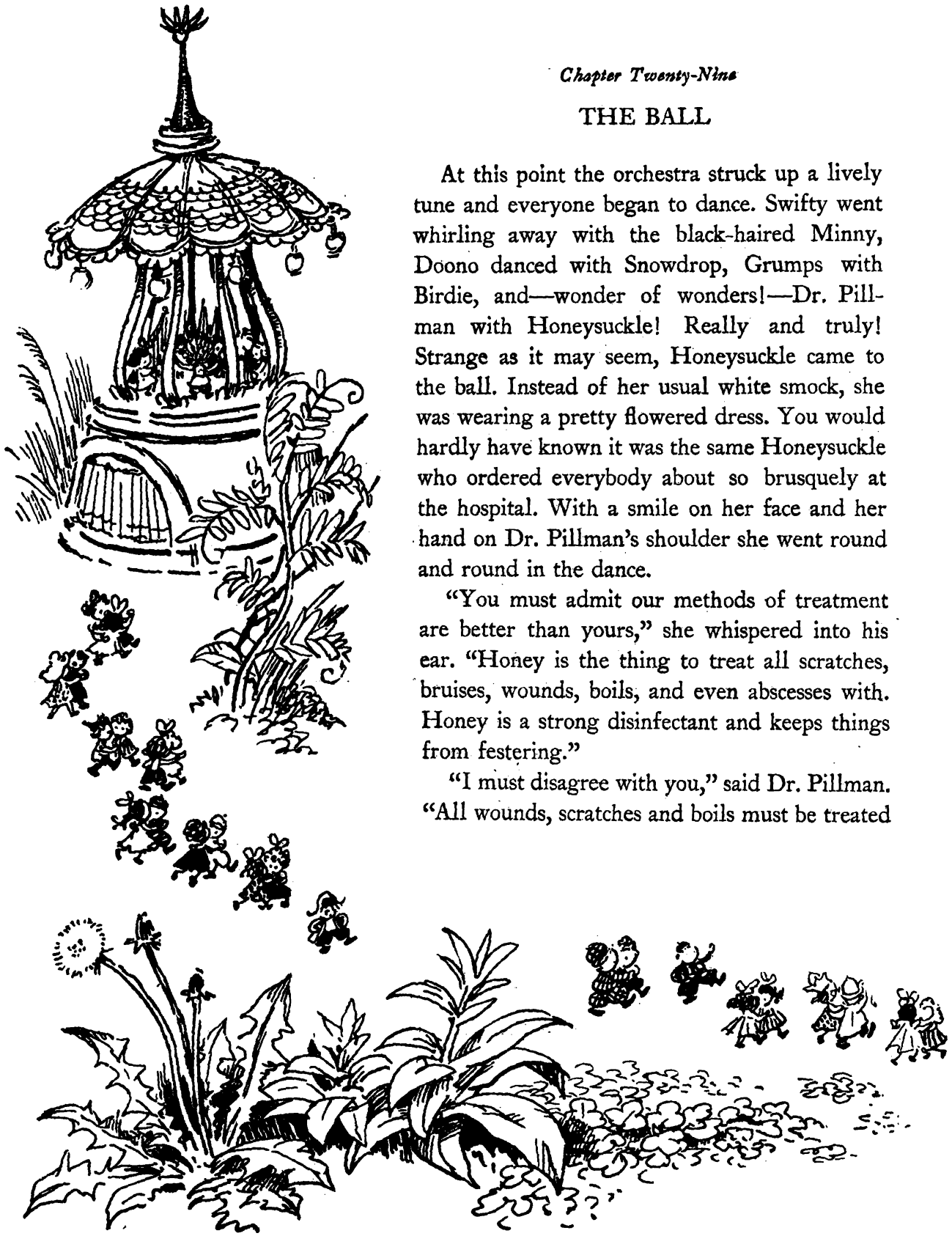
Birdie went over to him and said:

"You were crying, weren't you, you poor darling? Everybody made fun of you, didn't they? Boy-Mites are like that. But we won't let them make fun of you any more." Walking off a few steps, she whispered to the girl-Mites: "We must be very kind to him. He's been punished for what he did and now he's sorry and will try to be better."

"Of course!" said Kitty. "It's very wrong to make fun of him. He'll become angry and behave worse than ever. But if you're nice to him he'll feel that he was in the wrong and try to make up for it."

The girls crowded round Dunno and showed him how sorry they were.

"I used never to want to play with girls," said Dunno. "I thought boys were better than girls, but now I see I was wrong. The boys made fun of me, but the girls stood up for me. From now on I'm going to play with girls."



Chapter Twenty-Nine

THE BALL

At this point the orchestra struck up a lively tune and everyone began to dance. Swifty went whirling away with the black-haired Minny, Doono danced with Snowdrop, Grumps with Birdie, and—wonder of wonders!—Dr. Pillman with Honeysuckle! Really and truly! Strange as it may seem, Honeysuckle came to the ball. Instead of her usual white smock, she was wearing a pretty flowered dress. You would hardly have known it was the same Honeysuckle who ordered everybody about so brusquely at the hospital. With a smile on her face and her hand on Dr. Pillman's shoulder she went round and round in the dance.

"You must admit our methods of treatment are better than yours," she whispered into his ear. "Honey is the thing to treat all scratches, bruises, wounds, boils, and even abscesses with. Honey is a strong disinfectant and keeps things from festering."

"I must disagree with you," said Dr. Pillman. "All wounds, scratches and boils must be treated

with iodine. Iodine, too, is a strong disinfectant and keeps things from festering."

"But you can't deny that your iodine burns the skin, while our honey is absolutely painless."

"I can't deny that your honey may do for treating girl-Mites, but it can't possibly be used on boy-Mites."

"Why is that?" asked Honeysuckle.

"You yourself have said that treatment with honey is painless."

"And do you think treatment ought to be painful?"

"I do," said Dr. Pillman firmly. "If a boy-Mite climbs a fence and scratches his leg, the leg must be painted with iodine so that the patient will know it is dangerous to climb fences and will not do it again."

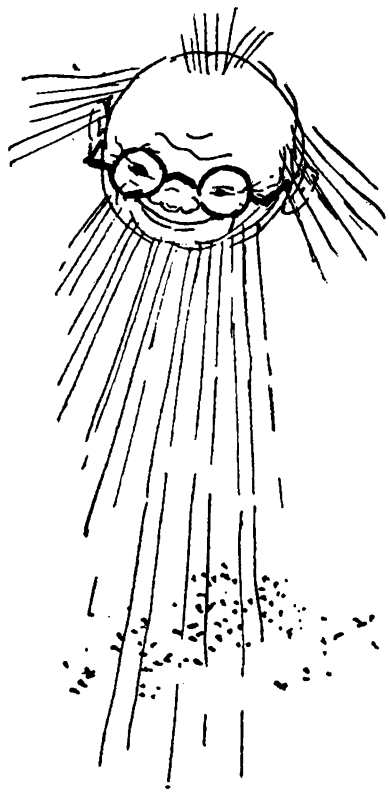
"He'll just climb roofs instead and fall down and hurt his head," said Honeysuckle.

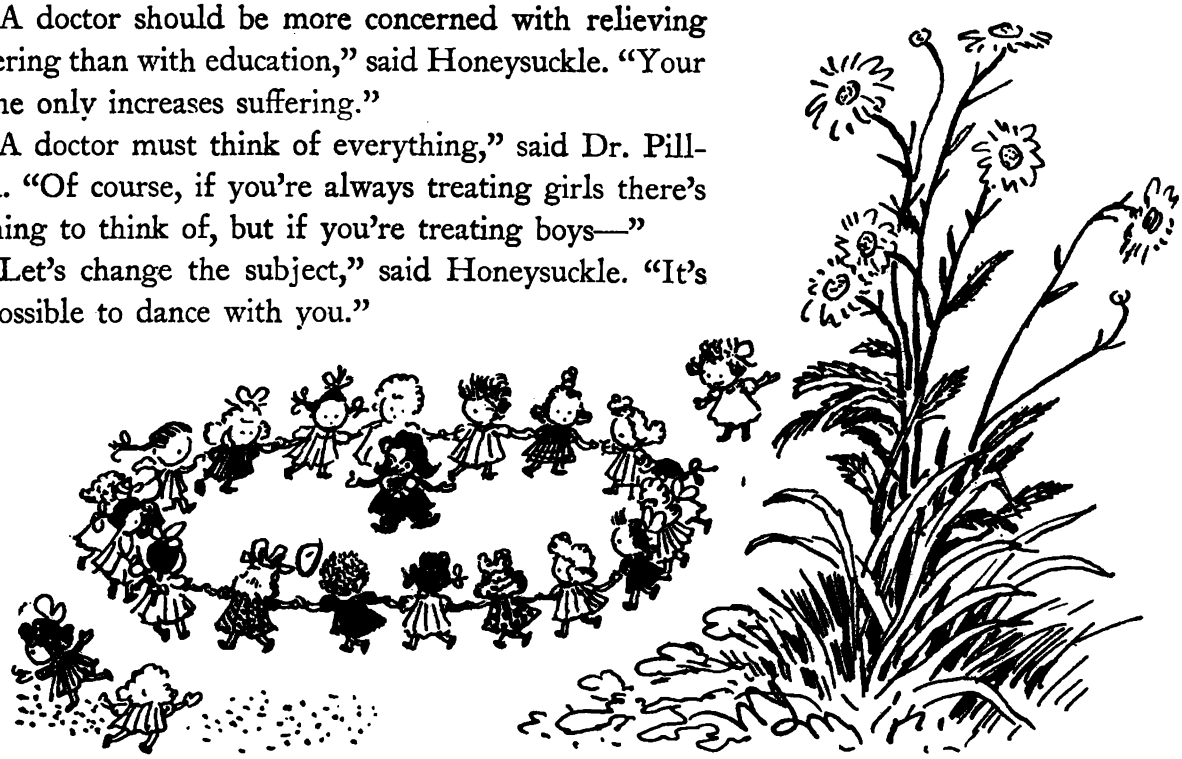
"Then we'll paint his head with iodine so that he'll know it's dangerous to climb roofs too. Iodine has great educational significance."

"A doctor should be more concerned with relieving suffering than with education," said Honeysuckle. "Your iodine only increases suffering."

"A doctor must think of everything," said Dr. Pillman. "Of course, if you're always treating girls there's nothing to think of, but if you're treating boys—"

"Let's change the subject," said Honeysuckle. "It's impossible to dance with you."





"It's you it's impossible to dance with!"

"You might be more civil."

"It's hard to be civil when I meet with such ignorance."

"It's you who are ignorant. You're not a doctor at all, you're just a quack!"

"And you're a ... you're a...."

Dr. Pillman was too furious to speak. He just stood there in the middle of the floor opening and closing his mouth like a fish out of water. Other couples kept bumping into them. Honeysuckle was nearly knocked off her feet.

"What are you standing here for?" she said, pulling his sleeve. "Dance. We're in the way."

With a hopeless wave of his hand, Dr. Pillman went whirling down the floor. At first they danced in silence, but soon they took up the quarrel again.

Roly-Poly was dancing with Fluff. Their talk was of an entirely different nature.

"Are you fond of bon-bons?" asked Roly-Poly.

"Awfully," said Fluff. "Are you?"

"Oh yes. But I like French pastry better."

"And I like ice-cream best of all."

Bendum was dancing with Chippy.

"I'd just love to learn to drive a car," said Chippy. "Lots of my friends know how, so I think I could learn too."

"It's very simple," said Bendum. "All you have to do is turn on the ignition, put her in gear, and step on the gas...."

Dunno was dancing with Cornflower. That is, he wasn't really dancing. She was dancing, but he was just leaping about like a goat, stepping on her toes and knocking into everybody.

"Let's sit out this dance," said Cornflower when she could stand it no longer.

They sat down on a bench.

"I don't know how to dance at all," confessed Dunno.

"I'm glad to hear you say it," said Cornflower. "Another boy would be sure to make excuses—say his feet hurt or his head ached, but you are honest enough to say you don't know how. I see I can make friends with you."

"Of course you can," said Dunno.

"I like to have boy-friends," said Cornflower. "I don't like girls because they're always standing in front of the looking-glass and thinking of their looks."

"Some boys like to stand in front of the looking-glass too," said Dunno.

"But you don't, do you?"

"Oh no!" said Dunno. (This was not quite the truth, for he often glanced at himself in the looking-glass when no one was watching, and he thought quite a good deal about his looks. But so do all boys if the truth be told.)

"I'm very glad you don't," said Cornflower. "Let's be friends, you and I, shall we? And let's write letters to each other. First you write to me and then I'll write to you."

Caught! thought Dunno to himself, for he hardly knew how to write, and of course he would be ashamed to have Cornflower know this.

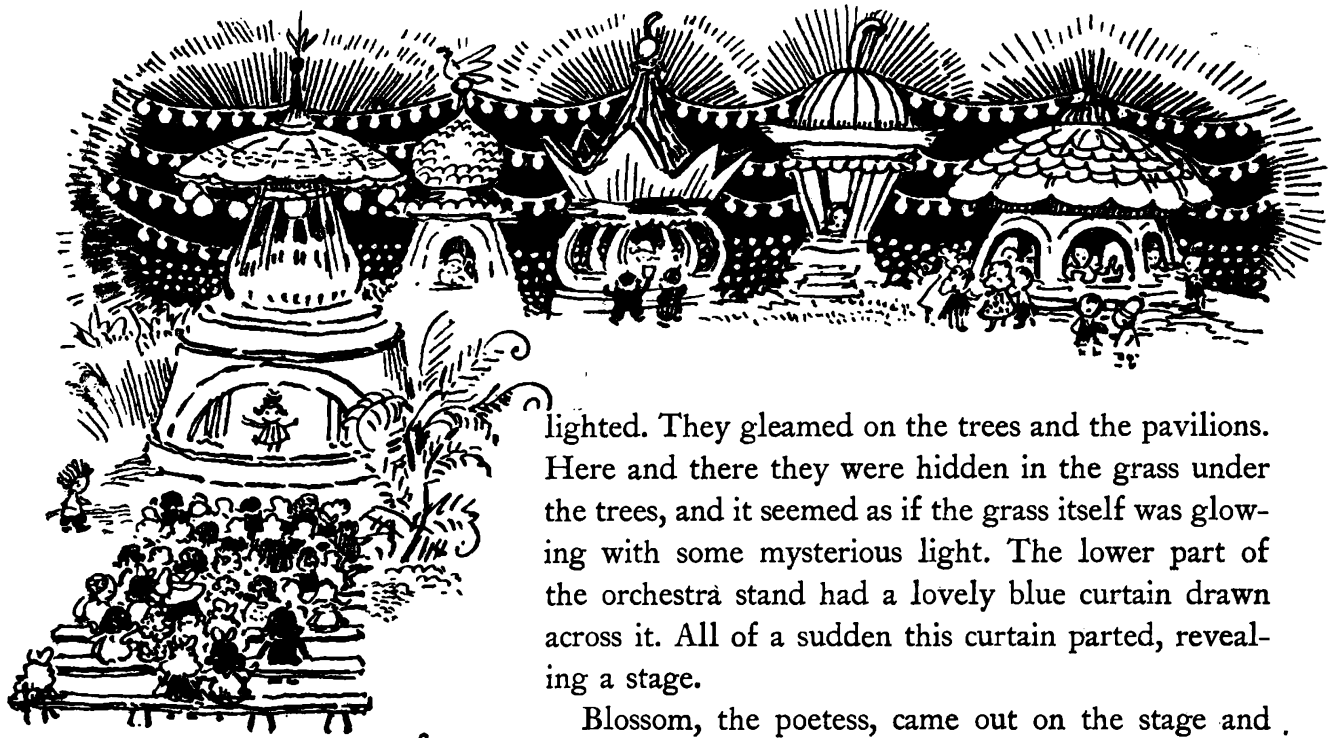
"Why should we write letters?" he muttered uneasily. "We don't live far away from each other. We can talk to each other."

"What a bore you are, Dunno!" said Cornflower. "You don't want to do anything I ask you to. If you only knew what fun it is to get letters!"

"Very well," said Dunno. "I'll write to you."

Soon it grew dark.

Hundreds of coloured lanterns were



lighted. They gleamed on the trees and the pavilions. Here and there they were hidden in the grass under the trees, and it seemed as if the grass itself was glowing with some mysterious light. The lower part of the orchestra stand had a lovely blue curtain drawn across it. All of a sudden this curtain parted, revealing a stage.

Blossom, the poetess, came out on the stage and cried:

"Quiet, everybody! We are going to have a concert. Quiet!"

The Mites sat down on the benches in front of the stage and waited for the concert to begin.

"Quiet!" cried Blossom again. "The first number on the programme is me. I am going to read you my latest poem. It's about friendship."

The Mites clapped loudly. When the clapping had died down Trills lifted his baton, the orchestra began to play, and Blossom recited her poem to music. It was as fine a poem as all the others she had written, and it ended with the words: "On friendship happiness depends, we ought to always be good friends." Everyone liked the poem.

Next some dances were performed. Twelve girl-Mites dressed in thin frocks of different colours trimmed with ribbons did a number of dances, the most popular of which was "Turnip." The audience

clapped their hands and called out "Encore!" until this dance was repeated twice. After this a boy-Mite chorus from Kite Town sang a few songs.

As soon as this chorus stopped singing Trills climbed on to the stage and called:

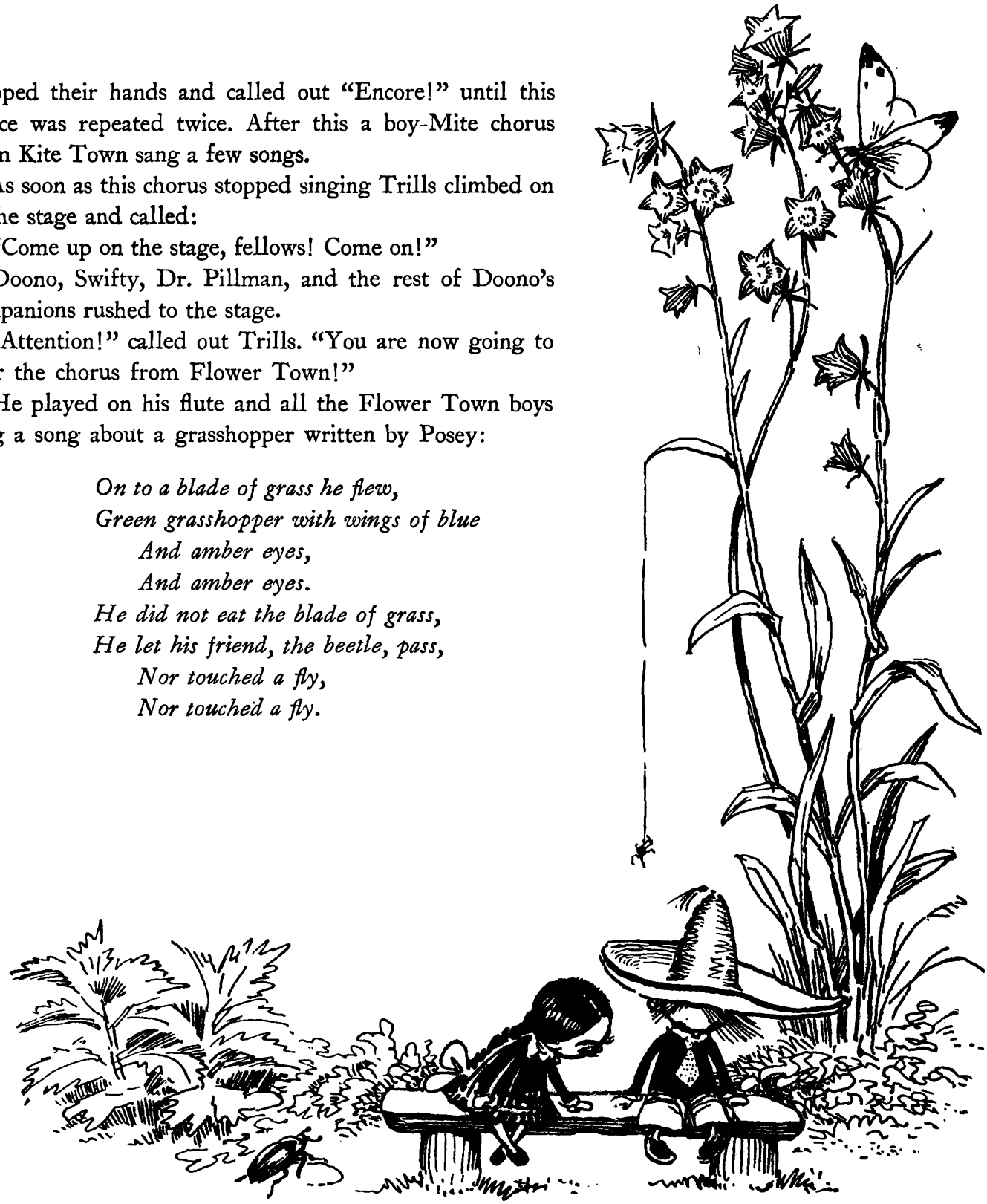
"Come up on the stage, fellows! Come on!"

Doono, Swifty, Dr. Pillman, and the rest of Doono's companions rushed to the stage.

"Attention!" called out Trills. "You are now going to hear the chorus from Flower Town!"

He played on his flute and all the Flower Town boys sang a song about a grasshopper written by Posey:

On to a blade of grass he flew,
Green grasshopper with wings of blue
And amber eyes,
And amber eyes.
He did not eat the blade of grass,
He let his friend, the beetle, pass,
Nor touched a fly,
Nor touched a fly.



But soon a tree-toad, greedy beast,
Came hopping by, and made a feast
Of beetle's friend,
Of beetle's friend.
Could ever one with ways so sweet
Expect, as his reward, to meet
So sad an end?
So sad an end?

So mournful was the song that not even the singers could keep from weeping bitterly. All of them felt sorry for the poor grasshopper who was eaten up by the greedy tree-toad. Tears streamed down every cheek.

"Such a sweet grasshopper!" gulped Scatterbrain.

"Didn't touch a fly, and was a friend to the beetle!" sniffled Swifty.

"And then had to go and get eaten up by a toad!" whimpered Bendum.

Doono was the only one who remained untouched.

"Don't cry, friends," he said consolingly. "The toad didn't really eat the grasshopper. It ate a fly, honest to goodness it did."

"Then I'm sorry for the fly," wailed Bendum.

"Why should you be sorry for a fly? They're a general nuisance and spread disease. How foolish to cry over a fly!"

"I'm not crying over a fly," said Grumps. "It's just that the song reminds me of how we used to sing back home."

All of a sudden Dunno sobbed so loudly that everyone else stopped crying and turned to comfort him. They begged him to tell them what the trouble was, but he was sobbing too hard to answer them. At last he gasped out:

"I ... I ... want to see ... Gunky!"

"How is that?" asked everyone in surprise. "He never showed the least concern for Gunky, and now he's crying for him!"

"Oh, didn't I?" said Dunno pettishly. "Do you think it's nice for me to be here and Gunky there?"

"Your Gunky won't die without you," said Swifty.

"He misses me just as much as I miss him. He's my very best friend, and I didn't even say good-bye to him when I left."

"Why didn't you?"

"I quarrelled with him and didn't want to say good-bye. When we sailed away he kept looking at me and waving his hand to me, but I turned away on purpose and wouldn't look at him. I was very proud to be going up in a balloon, but now I am troubled by my ... by my ... what do you call it?"

"Conscience?" suggested Dr. Pillman.

"That's it—conscience. If I had said good-bye to him I would feel better. Let's go home. I'll make it up with Gunky and say good-bye to him."

"If we go home you'll want to say hullo and not good-bye," said Doono.

"First I'll say good-bye and then hullo, and everything will be all right."

"I'm afraid we'll have to go home, friends," said Trills. "Dunno is homesick."

"Well, it's high time I was getting back, too," said Dr. Pillman. "What if someone in Flower Town should fall ill while I'm away?"

"All good things must come to an end," said Doono. "We've got to go home some time. Let's go tomorrow."

When the ball was over, Cornflower went over to Dunno.

"So you're leaving?" she said sadly.

"Yes, it's time we were going home."

"You weren't here very long."

"I'd like to stay longer, but I want to go home, too," said Dunno, dropping his head.

Cornflower said nothing for a little while.

"Of course it's time for you to go home," she sighed at last. "Your friends must be worried about you. I'm very glad that you don't forget your friends."

Both of them were silent. Dunno wanted to say something, but the words stuck in his throat. He dug into the earth with his heel and kept his eyes on the ground, unable to look at Cornflower. He was afraid she would notice the tears in his eyes. At last he raised his head and their eyes met.

"Would you like me to make you a knapsack?" she asked.

"I would."

On the next day Doono and his friends set out. They had decided to go on foot. The balloon had burst and it would have been hard to mend it. Besides, the wind was against them. Doono, with the compass in his hand, led the way. Behind him came Dr. Pillman, then Bendum and Twistum and all the others. Dunno was the very last.

They all had knapsacks on their backs which the girls of Greenville had made for them. Inside the knapsacks were buns to eat on the way, as well as seeds of fruit, vegetables, and flowers that were not to be found in Flower Town. Treacly-Sweeter had put a water-melon seed in each of his pockets.

All the girl-Mites of Greenville came to see them off, and many of them were crying.

"Don't cry," said Doono. "Some day we'll make another balloon and come back to see you."

"Come in the spring, when the apple-trees are in blossom," cried the girls. "It's very beautiful here in the spring."

The girls stopped when they got to the end of the town, and

the boys continued along a path that wound among high grasses and wild flowers.

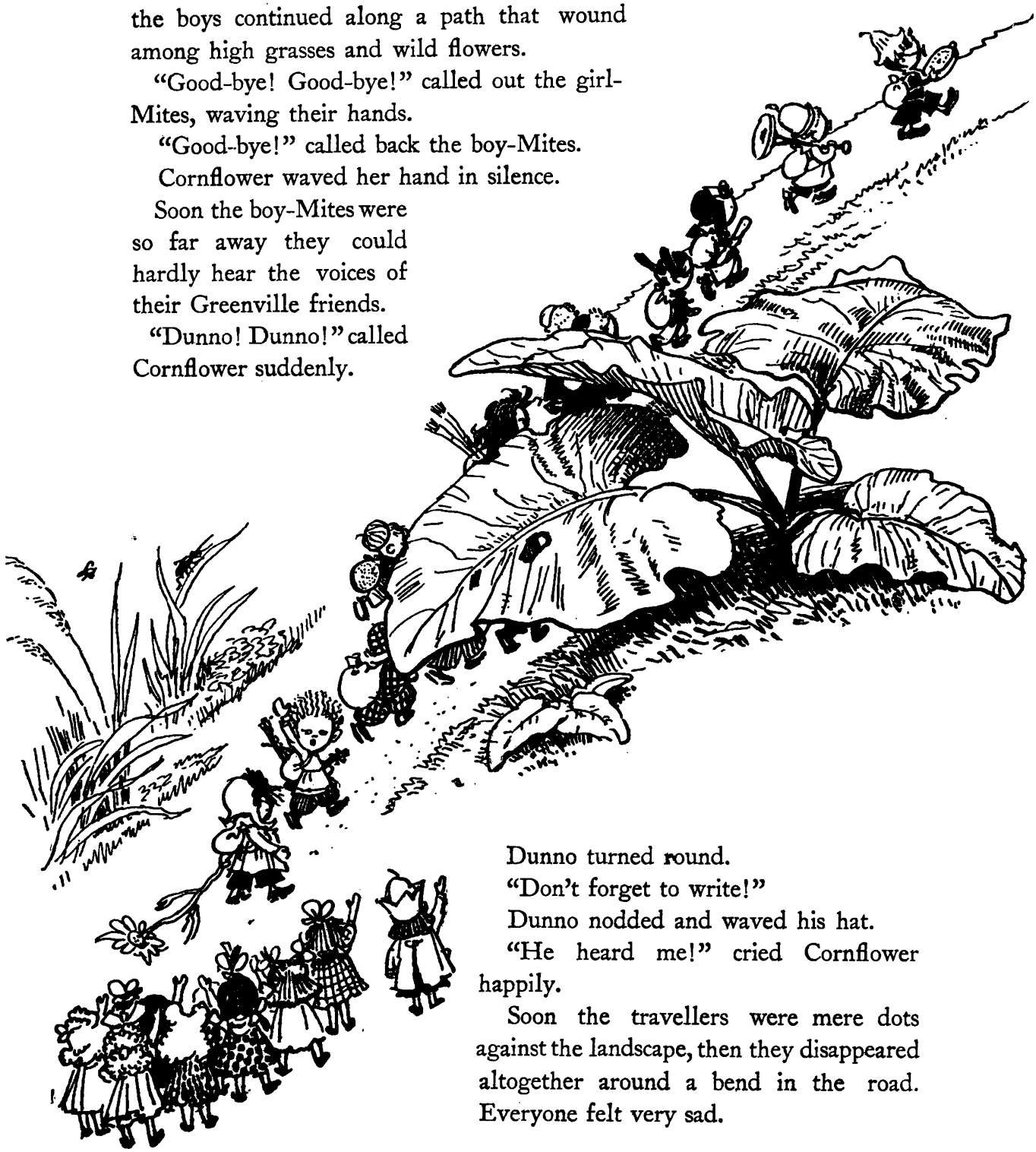
"Good-bye! Good-bye!" called out the girl-Mites, waving their hands.

"Good-bye!" called back the boy-Mites.

Cornflower waved her hand in silence.

Soon the boy-Mites were so far away they could hardly hear the voices of their Greenville friends.

"Dunno! Dunno!" called Cornflower suddenly.



Dunno turned round.

"Don't forget to write!"

Dunno nodded and waved his hat.

"He heard me!" cried Cornflower happily.

Soon the travellers were mere dots against the landscape, then they disappeared altogether around a bend in the road. Everyone felt very sad.

Chapter Thirty

HOME

For many days Doono and his friends made their way through fields and woods until they came to familiar country. One day they climbed to the top of a hill from which they got a view of Flower Town spreading below them in all its beauty.

It was late summer and flowers of all sorts were in bloom: white chrysanthemums, red dahlias, asters of many colours. Pansies, like bright moths, seemed to be flitting everywhere. Flame-coloured nasturtiums climbed over the fences, the walls, and even the roofs of the houses. The breeze was laden with the sweet scent of mignonette and daisies.

Doono and his friends threw their arms about each other in their joy.

Soon they were walking down the streets of their native town. Mites ran out of all the houses to get a look at the explorers.

Doono and his friends were so sunburnt that at first nobody recognized them.

Then somebody cried out:

"Why, it's Doono, fellows! See, he's marching at the head!"

This was followed by cries from all sides:

"And there's Dr. Pillman! And Shot, and Scatterbrain, and Roly-Poly!"

"Hurrah!" cried the Mites of Flower Town joyously.

But the greatest excitement came when Doono and his friends turned into Bluebell Street. Here everybody knew them, everybody was a friend or a neighbour. It was impossible to get through the street for the crowd. The boy-Mites hugged and kissed the valiant explorers; the girl-Mites strewed the road with the petals of flowers.

Suddenly a little dog ran up. It barked and leaped about Shot and licked his hand.

"Dot!" cried the delighted hunter. "Look, fellows, it's my Dot!"

The neighbours said that Dot had come home a few days after the taking-off of the balloon. This had made them think that the explorers had all been killed, and they had given up hope of ever seeing them again.

Shot snatched Dot up in his arms and kissed him.

"You blessed pup!" he said. "So you're alive and kicking, are you? If you ever knew how I missed you!"

At the end of the street appeared another group of Mites with the poet Posey at their head.

"A poem!" cried everybody. "Now we'll hear a poem!"

The girl-Mites clapped their hands and the boy-Mites ran for an empty barrel, which they set up on end in the middle of the street.

"Climb up on the barrel, Posey, and give us a poem!" somebody cried out.

Posey was seized under the arms and hoisted up on to the barrel.

For a moment he stood there deep in thought, then he cleared his throat, stretched out his arms to Doono and his friends, and in a voice full of emotion recited a poem he had made up that very minute:

Up they went in a balloon,
Sailing higher than the moon,
But back they came, and none too soon,
Without a sign of the balloon.

"Hurrah!" cried everybody ecstatically.

Instantly Posey was snatched off the barrel. The boy-Mites carried him home on their shoulders while the girl-Mites ran behind, throwing flower petals at him.

Posey won as much fame for this poem as if he himself had been a member of the famous expedition.

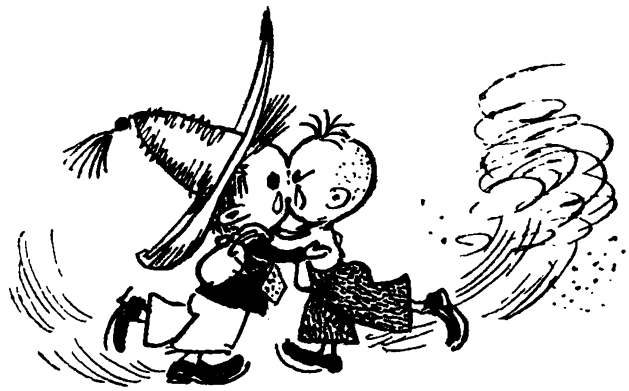
Our valiant explorers opened the gate and went into their house, which had stood empty for so long a time. Dunno did not go with them. He remained standing in the street, gazing sadly after the disappearing crowd and looking about him as if in search of somebody. There was not a soul in sight. It was as if the wind had swept everybody away.

An expression of even greater sadness came into Dunno's eyes, but just then he caught sight of someone standing in the shadow of the fence, staring at him with parted lips and wide-open eyes.

"Gunky!" cried Dunno, holding out his arms.

Gunky gave a little squeal of joy and threw himself at Dunno, who ran to meet him. They almost banged foreheads. There was love and pride in Gunky's eyes as he gazed at his friend, now a famous explorer. Dunno gave a guilty little smile. For some time they stood there, too moved to say a word. Then they threw themselves into each other's arms again and wept with joy.

With that the remarkable adventures of Dunno and his friends came to an end and life in Flower Town went on in the same old way—yet not quite in the same old way.



From that time on the Mites of Flower Town talked of nothing but the balloon trip. Boy-Mites and girl-Mites alike came to Doono's house every evening to hear accounts of life in Greenville.

Roly-Poly told about the delicious pies and cakes the girls there had treated him to, and Treacly-Sweeter boasted of how much soda-water and syrup he had drunk. Doono described the fountains and the reed water-pipes, the bridge over the river and the enormous water-melons. When he got to the water-melons, Treacly-Sweeter took a seed out of his pocket and said:

"Who would ever think a seed this size could produce barrels of syrup?"

P'raps and Swifty were fond of telling about how they had helped gather in the apple harvest. Bendum and Twistum told about the mechanization of fruit-picking, and also about their friend Pretzel and the plumber-inventor Taps who had buttons for everything. Shot enjoyed telling about his stay in hospital and the excellent doctor Honeysuckle, who had so ably treated his sprained ankle that he could jump as well as walk on it now. As proof of this he would jump about on one leg—the leg he had injured.

Everyone told about how friendly they had been with the girl-Mites. Even Mums, who rarely opened his mouth, said:

"I never would have believed a fellow could have just as good a time with girls as with boys."

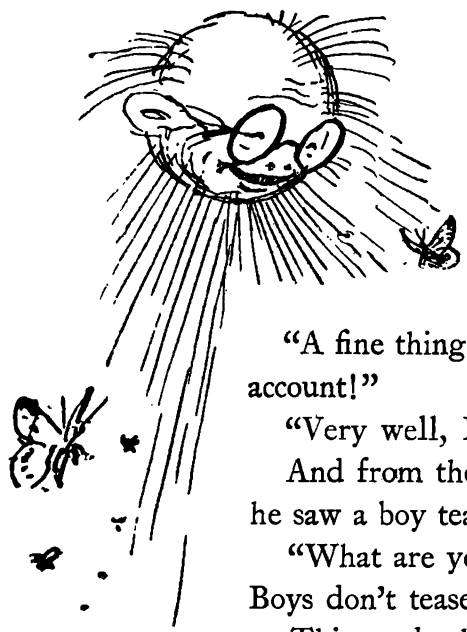
"You'd do better to hold your tongue," said Dunno. "I didn't notice that you made friends with anybody in particular."

"And did you?" he was asked.

"Yes, I did. I made friends with Cornflower."

"I don't believe you," said Tinkle. "You even quarrelled with Gunky, your best friend, for playing with girls."

"Nothing of the sort!" said Dunno. "Gunky and I have made it up and from now on we're going to play with girls all we like."



"Why didn't you play with them before?" asked Daisy.

"I was very foolish before. I was afraid of being laughed at."

"And you're still afraid," said Pee-Wee.

"I am not. If you don't believe it, I'll play with you. Want me to? And if anybody makes fun of us I'll bash his nose in."

"A fine thing!" said Pee-Wee. "As if I wanted anybody to fight on my account!"

"Very well, I won't. I just won't pay any attention to their teasing."

And from then on he was very friendly with Pee-Wee, and whenever he saw a boy teasing a girl he would go up to him and say:

"What are you teasing her for? See that I don't catch you at it again! Boys don't tease girls in our town!"

This made the girls respect him and say that he was a very nice little Mite. It made the other boys jealous to hear the girls praise him, and so they, too, began to stand up for girls. In this way the teasing of girls came to an end. It simply wasn't done in Flower Town. If, by chance, some boy would pull a girl's hair or say something nasty to her, everybody would make fun of him—call him a lump, and say he had no manners. The boys no longer chased away girls who wanted to play with them; on the contrary, they always invited them to take part in their games.

Doono decided to introduce reed-pipes in Flower Town and to build some fountains—at least one in every street to begin with. He also suggested putting up a bridge over Cucumber River so that the Mites could walk to the woods. All these tasks were undertaken by boy-Mites and girl-Mites alike. From morning till noon they were busy building the bridge, laying the water-pipes, and making the fountains. In the afternoon they played games: hide-and-seek, nine-pins, football, and volley-ball.

But Dunno rarely took part in these games.

"I have no time to play," he said. "I hardly know how to read, and I can only write printed letters. I've just got to learn to write a nice hand. There's a very important reason."

And so instead of playing nine-pins or football, he would sit down at the table and read. He only read one page a day, but even that was good practice. Sometimes he read two pages: one for today, the other for tomorrow.

When he had finished reading he took out his note-book and began to write. He stopped printing his letters and began joining them together in long-hand. He found it very hard at first, and covered the paper with the most awful jerks and scrawls. But soon he got the hang of it and made very neat letters, capitals as well as small ones. The thing that troubled him most was blots.

Dunno was always making blots in his note-book. Whenever he made one he would lick it with his tongue. This gave the blots long tails, and so he called them "comets." There was hardly a page of his note-book without a comet on it, but he did not lose heart. He knew that if he was patient and worked hard he could even get rid of comets.